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A WOMAN'S LOVE-STORY.

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NEW YORK
George Munro
PUBLISHER

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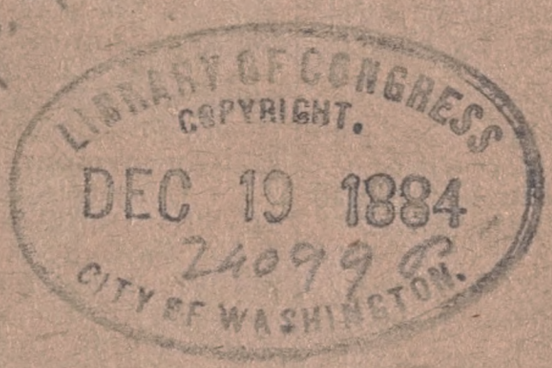
A WOMAN'S LOVE-STORY

By Mrs. Diehl

A NOVEL.

Athenaeum Jan. 2. 1886 P. 14



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A WOMAN'S LOVE-STORY.

CHAPTER I.

LILITH was ugly. She was tall, thin, tawny, with a thick mane of black hair, and black eyes that had a sort of ferocity in their intent gaze. She was the only grandchild of the popular Squire Ware; and there was not a more popular couple than the rubicund jolly squire and the kind little old lady madam, his wife, for miles around. There was always a welcome for guests at the old stone Hall; at Heathside Hall there was open house. Then the squire was a good magistrate, a careful preserver of game, gave handsomely to the church, was devoted to the poor and to widows, and the sick had reason to bless his very name, as they did. Then Lilith's mother, the beautiful Mrs. Drew, who had mysteriously reappeared in her father's home some years after her marriage with the dashing young Guardsman, Captain Drew, and who, with the child Lilith, had lived there in seclusion ever since, held the county sympathy by reason of her worse than widowhood. Still every one called Lilith ugly. And they shrunk from her, and wondered how the handsome old squire and pretty madam, and the delicate graceful Mrs. Drew—who, with her willowy figure and pallid beauty, reminded people of a lily—could make such a fuss about the swarthy gypsy-like creature. The gossips said she was wonderfully clever, could paint anybody or anything, could sing and play, and read those solemn-looking calf-bound tomes in the great library at the Hall with the same relish with which any other girl would read a story-book. Still they looked upon her cleverness as somewhat witchlike. They could not forget that the dark handsome scoundrel who had loved and won the county belle Lilian Ware, and had afterward brutally deserted her and eloped with an actress, was Lilith's father. When good old ladies talked about Lilith over their tea, they would charitably say that, if she was ugly—which was an undoubted fact—it was a mercy that she was nothing worse. Still there was time yet even for that, they would sorrowfully add, with bated breath.

Yes, there was time yet. Lilith was like some darkly-shut bud on a suspected but little-understood plant. The bud might burst into almost any extraordinary blossom.

It was the eve of her fifteenth birthday, a warm, still summer evening in June. She had dined with her grandfather, grandmother, and mother, but had been darkly silent during the meal. Ordinarily she burst out with all the thoughts which had agitated her restless mind during the day, with her quaint fancies—which

the squire would laugh at or listen to as his humor prompted, while deaf Madam Ware would enjoy watching the varying expressions upon her loved ones' faces, and placid Mrs. Drew would hang upon this curious being's queer words, in her chronic wonderment how this dark, strange, clever creature came to be her own child, her one only possession in life. But to night Lilith's mind was oppressed with the magnitude of the birthday favor she was about to ask. It had been the squire's custom to grant one request of hers on the eve of each anniversary of her birth, as it came round—provided always that it was in his power to grant the desired favor. Generally both her mother and grandfather well knew what her demand would be—for Lilith was honestly outspoken. But this time she had said nothing to any one. She had only had fits of silence, and her lonely gypsy-like wanderings about the estate had been longer and more frequent. Her mother wondered on the subject languidly and resignedly, as she had always thought and felt since her social martyrdom. The squire also wondered "what the chit would be up to next" when he happened to think of Lilith and the coming birthday. And that evening, as soon as the men-servants had removed the table-cloth, and the four were alone, sitting round the polished mahogany table laden with silver dishes of ruddy strawberries and other June fruit, he leaned back in his chair, tucking his thumbs into his arm-holes, gave a long low chuckle as he looked at Lilith, and said—

"Well, little mistress, your old grandfather hasn't forgotten what day it is to-morrow; nor you either—eh, wench? What are you going to rob me of this time? You stole my heart the first birthday, you know! There's nothing of that sort left—mind that! Come, out with it!"

Lilith's black eyes fixed themselves on her grandfather's joyous face, the rubicund jollity of which had made folk say Squire Ware's visage was "a sight for sore eyes;" then she turned them swiftly toward her mother.

"I sha'n't say it out. I will whisper it, if you like," she said.

"Hoity-toity! Here's mystery for you! Here's necromancy and what's-its-name! Mother mustn't hear—eh, Lil?"

The squire was always childishly gratified by any one's confidence, however trivial. If a village child came up and thrust its dirty little hand into his—as children would instinctively do sometimes—the soiled little paw was sure of a warm shake, and was sometimes clinched upon a bright silver sixpence afterward. So he willingly lent his ear. But, as Lilith whispered, he looked puzzled.

"Eh—what do you mean?" he asked.

Lilith whispered again—then suddenly flew off out of the room.

"She said, 'Give me myself.' Is anything wrong with the lass? Has she gone cranky? What does she mean?" asked the squire blankly of Mrs. Drew.

"I think I understand, father," said the faded but beautiful lady, her thin cheeks flushing just a little. "She wants to—to go away."

"Where—where on earth to?" cried the squire hastily. 'School? Didn't I say she ought to go to school long ago? She's too old now. Just like all you women! When you're wanted to do a thing, you won't; but, when the right time for doing the thing is

over and past and gone, oh, then you're hot on it, and you'll hear of naught else! Well, if she wants to go, I say she sha'n't go! So there now! Put that in your pipes and smoke it!"

The squire was peppery at times; but no one thought much of his little splutteringsl. He was seriously put out now. He pushed back his chair, got up, and went off to his smoking-room.

"Something is amiss, my love," said the deaf old lady, who had been anxiously listening from the bottom of the big dining-table, "or your dear father would not forget his manners."

"Nor his port," added Mrs. Drew, who in her gentle monotone could unconsciously say much that was to the point. She looked back through the dining-room window as she gave her arm to her mother, and, as she helped her to walk carefully to the great drawing-room where they sat at night, she fancied she saw Lilith flit like a bat across the sunset background.

Lilith had gone out into the grounds. She had paused on the lower terrace. The square gray-stone mansion stood on the brow of a slope; the hall-door opened upon the carriage-drive. This road wound through the thickly-wooded park where the deer were crouching to rest among the bracken under the shrubbery fence. The shrubberies were mysterious in the twilight; but the house lay between Lilith and this darkening landscape. She stood opposite to the glowing sky. While the orange and golden lakelets among the crimson and snowy clouds flushed the gray-stone façade and turned the glass windows into glittering jewels, they were reflected on Lilith's dark face; and she looked like some elf, with her fiery eyes shining under her brown garden-bonnet.

Before her lay the garden, laid out in prim walks, with high box borders. The beds were a tangled mass of bushy old-fashioned flowers. To the right, towering elms and bushy chestnuts hid the stables and outhouses, the big barn and sheds. To the left was the kitchen-garden wall. The flower-garden sloped to the "wild part," as Lilith called it. Here ferns flourished under the nut-trees. The fish-pond and a hut with a thick thatch that was called "the wigwam"—a favorite haunt of Lilith's—were both indistinct under the row of poplars which stood between the squire's garden and his wide fields.

Lilith was in one of her fiercest humors, half passion, half pain. She gazed with a passionate longing toward the world behind those slim black poplars. It looked as if the gorgeous world of her imagination was bathed in gold, while her little corner of it was in the shadow. She stretched out her arms toward "the world" she longed to be in and about; but there was hope mingled with the longing to-day. She was asking to go into that long-dreamt-of world, which her imagination had unfolded in hundreds of wonderful pictures more wildly beautiful than Claude's or Turner's. The world was to Lilith a huge unending Olympic game, with millions of prizes for trifling victories. They could not, dared not, refuse to let her enter the lists—especially her ambitious mother, whose sigh was for "something to live for."

Lilith's passion was desire for the world. Her pain was a sort of remorse to leave her present life. Those three—grandfather, grandmother, mother—it seemed like treason to confess that they did not

fill that life. Then the old home—each room, each bit of furniture, was part of those fifteen years of hers, just as each animal, plant, tree, flower, was a friend.

She had been a curious babe. She was two years old when her mother brought her back to the old home. She had been very fond of the handsome gay father, who was never cross to any one. He had made a joke of her. His words to her mother, when he first saw the babe, had been, "Hallo, Lil, you've given me a little Indian!"—and he treated her as some pet bit of ugliness. When he came home, flushed and excited, from some Bohemian gathering where his siren, a popular actress, had intoxicated his sense of beauty, he would ask for his "papoose," as he called her, and play with her—not roughly—for it was not in his nature to be rough—but fantastically, tossing her about with his delicate hands, carrying her on his shoulder, and letting her long brown fingers twine themselves in his curly hair, kissing her. Her mother Lilian was nothing to him then, not even a feather's weight upon his conscience. The child was his own flesh and blood, and he petted her for lack of something better, till one day he suddenly and unexpectedly realized his ideal. His beloved, the stage beauty, quarreled with a far more important admirer, and in a huff bestowed herself upon Captain Drew. They were off and away in a few hours, and their elopement was a nine days' wonder.

Mrs. Drew accepted her fate with self-contained dignity. She did not break down. She went quietly home with "the papoose" and her nurse, and arrived at Heathside Hall with her ordinary gentle complacency. The squire was boiling over with rage, Madam Ware was bowed with grief. The injured wife was the calmest member of the household. She stipulated that her misfortune was not to be alluded to. Then she took up the old routine of her girlhood. She painted and practiced music in her former sitting-room. She did the honors of the house, and visited the neighbors on behalf of her deaf mother, as she had been wont to do. She had Lilith with her for a certain time each day, and superintended the nursery as any ordinary mother would do in ordinary circumstances. Her dowry—a handsome one—was strictly settled on herself, so there was no legal trouble. She said that she would have nothing to do with divorce, and that any one who interfered in her affairs without her knowledge or consent would be considered by her as a personal enemy. So even her most indignant champion next to her father—the energetic Rector of the parish—was hushed down, and thereafter held his peace.

Little Lilith missed her playfellow. She was an eccentric baby. She would flush up, turn away, and clutch at her nurse or mother at the very sight of some people, and would hold out her arms to others. She stared solemnly around her at first when she came to the Hall, and would not be betrayed into a smile. It seemed as if she looked upon these new surroundings as barriers between her and her father. "Da," as she had called him, was evidently in her baby-thoughts. She was always peering suspiciously into corners, and her unsteady totterings about the big rooms were strangely like voyages of discovery. After staggering from chair to chair, she would look thoughtfully about her, then suddenly drop down and

shuffle off rapidly on hands and knees to some curtain or table-cover. This she would lift slowly and gingerly, and peer behind the drapery. Evidently disappointed, she would sit gravely on the carpet, her hands in her lap, a solemn puzzled look upon her quaint baby-face, pondering. She had begun to prattle an infantine babble; but from the first day at Heathside she was silent for a time, except when, on occasion, she would awake suddenly in the night with a shrill cry, and, when pacified, would sob out, "Da!"

"It makes my blood run cold to see her all a-fret after the wicked wretch!" her nurse Mary, a stern upright woman, who had lived years in the Ware family, would say afterward below-stairs.

But Lilith's baby-dreams were not mentioned to her mother. By degrees the void in the little life was filled—Lilith began to love her mother. She would watch for her, and would be angry and beat her nurse when Mary came to carry her back to the nursery. Mrs. Drew began to have influence over her child; Lilith would control her temper at a glance from her mother. With Mrs. Drew she was content. She would sit for hours on the floor, gravely drawing queer shapes with pencil-stumps on odds and ends of paper, while her mother painted. Mrs. Drew made charmingly fanciful water-color drawings, and gave them to her friends or sold them at fancy bazaars. They were delicate representations of calm nooks in nature—quiet dells, with drooping willows and ferns reflected in calm transparent pools, or cottages in a snow-scene, with firs black against a lurid winter sunset, or some Eastern oasis, tall palms, tree-ferns, cactus, with networks of giant creeping plants flung gracefully about in the luminous tropical haze.

As time went on, Lilith began to meddle with the paints and brushes. Her mother, who taught her all she herself knew, taught her to draw. Then came sketching excursions. Lilith's sketches were crude daring pieces of effect. She would dash a sunset upon the paper in a few wild moments, catching the hues before they faded. When she was not playing or singing or wandering across country—her recreations after her lessons—to her, irksome work—she was painting. She sketched rather than spoke her restless thoughts.

Restless—for the child was not content. She felt as if something were urging her on—whither or for what she knew not. She would start up out of sleep, feeling as if she were called, though she heard no voice, only her heart beating in the silence. When she heard of some great deed, or read a stirring book, or was brought face to face with some noble work of art, a sudden fury seized her—a storm of desire and regret, a wild struggle to be free to do, to act; but all this was abortive, confused. The fury raged and passed, leaving no trace but a settled sensation that as soon as she was a grown girl she must go into the world and study to find out what her life-work was.

"When I am fifteen!" she said resolutely. And to-night the time had arrived.

She turned, hearing a light footstep crackle on the graveled terrace above. Mrs. Drew was coming toward her. Her sweet patient face, with the halo of fair hair, looked saintly in the eyes of her enthusiastic child. Her gray silk dress gleamed in the red light as she saw Lilith, and came tripping toward her down the broad stone steps.

"It feels damp," she said, twisting her cambric handkerchief round her fair throat. "Come into my room. Then we can talk over this tremendous communication which has scared poor grandpapa into the smoking-room."

"No, here—now!" Lilith eagerly dragged her mother to a bench on the terrace, and held her hands as she rapidly poured out her confidence. She had known all along that she had something to do in life—"something more than the Rawsons and the Wrights and all the people about, mother, you know," she said eagerly—"something great, something I must study for from six in the morning till ten at night. But I must go away to London." Then she unfolded her plans pretty clearly. She wanted to show her sketches to some eminent painter, to hear his fiat. If he said she might be a painter, she would work unceasingly. Were his opinion unfavorable, she would try music—"although I cannot love music like my painting," she said, with a sigh. "It is so vague; it gives one thoughts, but it does not realize them. Music seems to me the beginning of a whole universe of beautiful unknown things; but it never comes close to the things themselves. Painting gives you the things themselves. Oh, mother, why do you look like that?" for a grave uneasiness settled upon Mrs. Drew's wearily beautiful face. "Are you not ambitious? Have you not told me your one wish was for something to look forward to—to live for? Do you not remember when you told me how disappointed you were I was born a girl instead of a boy, and how I asked you to turn me into a boy by cutting my hair and letting me wear boy's clothes? You laughed at me then, of course. But I can be like a son to you now—in mind, in work. Why can't you let me?"

"My dear, I think I have learned to be practical by watching your wild ways," said Mrs. Drew, with an embarrassed smile. "You have done me good; I should not now ask for the moon, or, as Mary would say, for the top brick of the chimney. I am—content," she went on, looking round with a sigh at the quiet evening beauty. "If I were not, I should be—ungrateful. To be content is to be happy, Lilith."

"Happy?" cried Lilith, with a fierce glance. "Happy—and to look like a martyr? I always think of you when I pass that picture of St. Catherine in the gallery. You are like it. You look as if you were bearing torture for the sake of what was coming. Now my idea is—"

"Come in and talk to grandpapa," interrupted Mrs. Drew abruptly. Then, as they ascended the steps and went toward the long windows that opened upon the terrace, she spoke with mild sarcasm. "I do not wish to cast any doubt upon the fact that you have only to paint a picture six feet by four and it will at once by general acclamation be hung upon the line," she said quietly, "or, that you have only to play those peculiar compositions of yours—which always make me think of gipsies—to some musical authority, and you will be engaged at once for the best concerts of the season. These things happen constantly—in novels."

"But did you not say there was hidden talent in my sketches? Did not Mr. Rawson say I was a painter lost?"

"I am your mother, Lilith. Mr. Rawson is your indulgent friend."

"But I know—I feel it—myself."

Lilith spoke decidedly. Her mother said no more; but, as she pushed open the half-closed window and stepped into the great drawing-room, she felt that, argue coolly and logically as she might, the fact that there were nerve, strength, and peculiarity in Lilith's doings was undeniable.

"It may be a species of genius," she thought. "In any case, we ought to give it a chance."

So she went into the room intending to plead to a certain extent for Lilith's wild fancies. She did not cross her father's will. She could always make it incline toward her own when she chose to try.

The great drawing-room was an imposing room—high, square, with four massive oaken doors and a huge carved oaken mantel-shelf opposite to the long windows that were modern innovations. It was primly furnished with old cabinets full of rare china, with squat stools and heavy tables; and generations of family portraits simpered or scowled upon the walls above the staight high-backed chairs.

Madam Ware was accustomed to the low seats, and said the hard flat backs kept her shoulders in. She was knitting in her usual corner near the fire-place, where she sat of evenings, summer and winter. The squire was standing with his back to the hearth, his cheeks aflame, his wrathful eyes gleaming in the light of the wax-candles the footmen were arranging about the room. He had not had his port, and he had forgotten himself before his women-folk, two potent excuses for ill-humor.

He was certainly in a bad temper; but Mrs. Drew's inert, graceful self-possession was an antidote to what the squire's retainers called his "tantrums." As his daughter reclined calmly upon an old-fashioned *causeuse* and, taking a feather fan from a table close at hand, began leisurely to fan herself, he felt ashamed, inferior, somehow.

He felt still more ashamed as Mrs. Drew began to talk about Lilith. Mrs. Drew could talk fluently and dispassionately, so that even clever men, on the alert, could scarcely detect where she failed in logic.

No wonder that the squire—never a bookworm—felt respect for his daughter's opinions when she gravely held forth on the subject of Lilith.

She first descanted on art, which the squire knew nothing about. She represented Lilith as a possible votary, chosen—as it were, predestined—to be famous. This might be, just as Lilith herself and all about her might also be deceived. It was only just to Lilith to give her the chance of showing which of these two things was the truth. It was impossible for this truth to be got at unless Lilith's paintings were subjected to the opinion of an authority. Mrs. Drew pooh-poohed the musical tendency, in which she had little faith. Then she proposed the means of bringing about the desired result; and, after twenty minutes' discussion, the squire found himself giving his consent to his daughter's and granddaughter's migration to London, there to reside for an uncertain period.

He stared incredulously when he suddenly realized what this meant. Then he gave a chuckle—but it was a half-hearted one.

"It seems strange-like—you two wanting to leave the old house. Well—there! It'll be dull for mother and me without you," he said, as he went back to his room to calm himself with a pipe.

While Mrs. Drew explained in a shrill treble to Madam Ware what was going forward, Lilith stole out into the lofty hall.

The armor looked ghostly in the dim light of the flickering lamp which swayed gently as it hung from the arched roof; patches of pale moolight fell on the checkered black and white of the marble flooring. Lilith went to the window. The park and shrubberies lay darkly before her, mist was rising and floating in mysterious cloudlets.

Was this emblematic of her coming life or her present state? Lilith had a habit of looking into the passing moods of nature for shadows of the future.

"Why is it all?" she asked herself. "Why do we feel forced to do certain things that cannot benefit others, that cannot matter much? What is life for? To bring us through torments that will prepare us for the next?"

Like all her fellows, she was destined to learn at least part of the truth.

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CHAPTER II.

SQUIRE WARE having consented to Mrs. Drew's proposition to take Lilith to London for lessons, advice, *et cætera*, the arrangements were speedily made.

Mrs. Drew's income—the interest of the capital which had been her dowry—had been more than sufficient to cover her expenditure during these years she had lived in her old home; so she had saved a considerable sum, and could afford to spend a few hundreds a year for at least some little time to come.

She consulted her old friend and adviser, the popular Rector of the parish, and he approved her plans. These were to take a small house in London, to engage the head kitchen-maid and one of the housemaids at the Hall as cook and parlor-maid. The staunch Mary would continue to be maid to Lilith and herself.

"I almost think you ought to have some masculine protection," was the Rector's half-doubtful remark.

Mrs. Drew preferred the protection of bolts, bars, locks, and chains. So it was settled that her new household should be entirely feminine.

The house was chosen. Mrs. Drew went to town herself with the Rector and his wife, and made all the arrangements. The servants were sent to London, the knickknacks and odds and ends had been packed and sent off. Mrs. Drew and Lilith were spending their afternoons in paying farewell visits to neighboring country-seats, rectories, or vicarages. A farewell dinner-party was arranged, when all was suddenly stopped.

The squire was opening the post-bag as usual one morning, when Mrs. Drew, who was pouring out tea, saw him start, pause, then stare at a letter and thrust it into his pocket. Her first impulse was

to ask what was the matter. Then she thought, "It is no business of mine," and took no notice of the squire's hurried absent manner. There was a blank look of some emotion akin to dread upon his kindly face. Mrs. Drew began to fear that her father had been speculating, and had come to grief.

"Something is wrong with grandpapa," said Lilith, as he left his breakfast almost untasted, and, with some unintelligible excuse went away abruptly.

Something was wrong.

Squire Ware took his hat and stick, went off to the stables, peremptorily ordered a groom to stop rubbing down a carriage-horse and to saddle his cob, then stood chafing and fuming during the process, and mounted before the beast was fairly saddled and bridled, touching his flanks so smartly with his riding-whip that the steady brute clattered excitedly over the stable-yard stones and through the gates, albeit he carred a human being of sixteen stone.

"Summat's oop wi' squire," said the groom stolidly to the old coachman, who came out munching, disturbed while breakfasting by the unwonted sound of a horse's hoof at that hour of the morning. "He's daft-like!" And he mopped the sweat from his brow, for none who served the squire cared to intrude upon or serve him—alone—when his humor tended toward irascibility.

Meanwhile the squire rode off by a back lane. He did not notice the sweet pink wild-roses wet with morning dew. A lark soared up into the pale blue sky, the tall green corn waved in the fresh breeze; but he had no eye or ear for sights and sounds which usually held him spell-bound. He rode by the hay-field without so much as a glance to see whether the scythes were busy, or whether the new tossing-machine had arrived; he rode impatiently through a drove of young porkers, who squeaked and rushed into the ditches on either side of the narrow lane, while the drover stared after the squire, his bugbear as an exacting master, in amazement. What were sheep, pigs, or any of his live possessions to the squire to-day? He was oppressed with mingled grief, anger, and disgust. He was going to seek counsel and actual support from his old friend Hugh Rawson, the Rector. Meanwhile, as he rode along, hemuttered imprecations against a certain individual. He anathematized the day when this man was born; he anathematized the hour that brought them together. He ended his long string of severe sayings by the horrible utterance, "'Tis a good thing, after all, there's a bad place—a dust-hole for human refuse such as he!"

This thought was in his mind as his panting cob reached the top of the long slope, and, pausing, he saw the Rectory below him. The Rectory was a long low cottage-like building with a modest thatch, with its white-washed walls ablaze with red climbing roses, with bushes of slender fuchsia and spiky lavender in the neat garden, so slightly protected by a low green paling that it seemed to say to the whole world, "Come in, and welcome!" Here, there, and everywhere were well-pruned fruit-trees; and around were grassy meadows, where the Rector's cows and his sturdy horse grazed comfortably when they were not wanted.

The sight of the quiet homestead was a reproach to the squire's violent and unchristian humor. He rode his cob gently down the

lane leading to the Rectory fields, then dismounted, opened the gate, and led the horse through the long grass till they came to the little garden gate.

Mrs. Rawson, at work in the front parlor with her daughters Kate and Mary, saw the squire pass. Mary flew out—she was the squire's pet; but he waved her away with a kind word. It was the Rector he wanted; and he threw the cob's bridle round the gate-post and went straight in—through the narrow passage where guns, fishing-rods, and cues adorned the walls—to the Rector's study.

His knock was followed by a genial "Come in!"

"Hey, but this is indeed an unexpected treat—the squire, of all persons, so early in the morning!" said the Rector, rising from his table, piled with books, where he had been hard at work since sunrise, with an interval for breakfast, at his next Sunday's sermon. "But come, my friend, sit ye here," he added, with a change of voice, as he recognized some unusual condition in the squire's livid drawn features and his unsteady gait. "Sit ye here"—gently forcing him into a roomy easy-chair near the open window.

The Rector was a fine tall man, who stooped to enter by his low doorways; his handsome florid face was crowned by prematurely blanched hair; his keen black eyes, which seemed to possess the faculty of looking for and finding the truth, were softened as he saw he was wanted. Since Mrs. Drew's desertion by "that poor misguided fellow," as the Rector mercifully designated Captain Drew, he had constantly prepared himself to be unexpectedly summoned to the Hall.

Now he looked somewhat anxiously at the squire. Every one knew that Squire Ware was a high liver of a full habit—a man to whose constitution shocks would come amiss. When the Rector first glanced at him, the unpleasant word "apoplexy" darted through his mind. But, when the squire was comfortably seated near to his clerical and sympathetic friend, his color began to right itself. There was something soothing in the Rectory atmosphere. As he sat there he was opposite to a neatly-clipped grass-plot, with an apple-tree in the center, so loaded with green apples that the boughs were propped. Around him were books, books—lines, piles of books—all arranged with the utmost neatness, either on the shelves or piled on tables. The only sounds were the cheerful voices of the merry girls and their mother in the next room, and the twittering of the birds in the pleasant garden.

"I have come to tell ye—that blackguard is dead!" said the squire huskily.

The Rector winced, then recovered himself.

"Well, perhaps it is for the best," he began encouragingly. "Dear Lilian and her child—they will know their position—they will be freer to act."

"For the best?" roared the squire. "Here"—his trembling fingers searching his breast-pocket—"read that—then say if it is for the best!"—and he tossed a letter which bore a deep black border across to the Rector.

He opened it. There were two sheets.

"Read the black-bordered first," growled the squire. "'Tis the

father, General Drew. Like father, like son! However he dared—But read—read!"

The Rector read—slowly and carefully—turning back to the first page when he was at the second, more to give himself time to think than because there was any room for misinterpretation.

"DEAR SIR,—By copy of letter inclosed you will see that my son, Captain Drew, is dead. He died not only penniless, but in debt. Therefore the fact that he left no will is insignificant. Of course the woman who ruined him, and her children, must go to the parish for assistance. Were I a rich man, instead of a poor pensioner, they should not receive one farthing from me. I am demanding my son's clothes and effects. Should I find any papers that belong by right to his widow, your daughter, I will forward them to her; and I have the honor to be, dear sir,

"Your most obedient servant.

"GERALD DREW."

"Now read 'tother!" hissed the squire, who had been watching his friend's face.

The Rector had formed a habit of controlling his facial expression, and, if he was so far moved that he felt his countenance threatening to turn traitor and betray his feelings, he would prevent this by pursing his lips, as if in doubt, and leisurely stroking his chin with his right hand.

As he read the second letter, he pursed his lips and gently stroked his cheek and chin.

It was from the "play-actress," as the squire scornfully termed the woman who had lured away his daughter's husband, and written to General Drew—a wild passionate appeal.

"SIR,—Do not be hard upon a broken-hearted woman. Your son is dead. He died suddenly. In the morning he left us—our children and myself—well, smiling, happy; in the afternoon four men carried something to the door of our rooms, followed by a crowd. It was my beloved husband—dead! Do not grudge me the word 'husband.' If ever a man and woman were man and wife in the sight of Heaven, it was he and I. You may have heard me lightly spoken of, but never, oh, never after the day we promised to be true to each other till death! As you know, when he took me abroad, he sold his commission. On this we lived frugally, carefully, till he obtained a small situation and I had learned French well enough to appear on the French stage. The language was against me; as my four children came I lost my bloom—I no longer commanded the old terms. We were poor, so poor! Yet he struggled through it all, and was cheerful and brave, and never would indulge himself in things which he had formerly looked upon as bare necessaries of life, until I and the children had all we wanted. Then I had a bad illness, lost my voice, and with it my profession. I got a stray engagement for dumb parts, but so seldom that I could count the money I made in the year by farthings. Strive how we might, we got into debt, and he began to worry. He worked cruelly hard; he was always seeking extra work. He was so proud of our boy, Gerald, who is nearly twelve, and of our darling girls Florrie and

Winnie. He would teach them when he was dead tired, or drag himself up in the early morning to help Gerald with his studies. All this work, with the inward worry he tried to conceal, and did conceal from all but poor me, who loved him so, helped on the heart-disease which, the doctors say, killed him. They had a *post-mortem* examination, and then they tried to comfort me by telling me that if he had not died of that he could not have lived long. Comfort! There is no comfort in earth or heaven for me till the All-merciful lets me join my adored lost husband, as I know He will, if I try to be father and mother both to our children he loved so dearly. How I shall do this I do not know. But a way will come—oh, yes, a way will come! A great sacrifice has been offered up, and help has been promised to those who will sin no more. You, sir, and every one thought we committed a fearful sin. If we did, we have paid heavily already, and it is a ray of sunshine in my gloom to remember that at least my darling is spared further expiation. I will bear the rest. Trusting that you will be comforted in your grief at his loss,

"I am your obedient and sorrowing

"ALICIA DREW."

The Rector read the copy of "Alicia Drew's" letter very carefully, referring back again and again, till the squire, after wriggling and fidgeting, could no longer suppress his irritation, and blurted out—

"What d'ye think of a fellow who could dare send me that brazen-faced hussy's humbug? A general indeed! Disgrace to the British forces—a blotch on the Union Jack! When I got the letter, I wanted to be a Welshman, a Dutchman, a Greek, a—a—anything but an Englishman!" he blustered, mopping his face with his huge silk handkerchief. "I felt I'd have my epitaph written in a foreign language. Never was ashamed of being an Englishman before! Well?"—for the Rector was quietly, absently folding and refolding the letter. "What d'ye say? Swear—if it'll do you good! Is not the letter blasphemy—the rankest blasphemy?"

"I cannot see that the poor unfortunate woman writes in a blasphemous spirit," said the Rector quietly. "I see a remorseful, a penitent soul, struggling to bear punishment."

"Bah!" cried the squire, so vehemently that the Rector's wife and daughters started in the parlor and began to suspect that something serious had happened. "Now understand, Rawson—you know I'm a good friend to you and yours, and you're a good friend to me and mine; but we're not parson-in-the-pulpit and squire-in-the-pew this morning—we're man and man. What'd you say if a man came and stole your cob out of the field yonder, or one of your sheep that I passed in the three-acre turnip-field? They used to hang for sheep-stealing—a matter of a pound or so. What ought they to do for husband-stealing—to a creature who has ruined a sweet girl's life—my Lilian's life—and sent her home with her child, begging shelter from her old father and mother? Why, hanging, drawing, and quartering's too good for her!"

"Yet One said, 'Let him who is without sin among you cast a stone—'"

"Yes—oh, yes, if you will quote the Gospel! And One said that, if a man's cheek were smote, the man ought at once to turn his other cheek to be smote. But what 'ud you say to a public school-boy who had his face slapped and didn't off with his jacket and claim fair fight there and then? What 'ud you say to a man who wouldn't kick a man who insulted his women-folk and give him a horse-whipping into the bargain? You'd say he was no man, and you'd be right! Right is right, and wrong is wrong," said the squire, banging his fist upon the library table so noisily that the Rector's wife and daughters in the next room, who had already composed themselves to listen, looked significantly at one another; "and, if you, as a parson in the pulpit or out of the pulpit, don't say so, then—then—why, I'm ashamed of you, that's all—I'm downright ashamed of you!"

"And well you might be," said the Rector, with emotion, going across and laying his hand gently on the agitated old man's shoulder. "If I said wrong was right, I should disgrace my profession, and should be that one alluded to—that it would be well for a mill-stone to be hung about his neck and be cast into the sea. But, while we reverence Heaven's laws, we may still pity the law-breakers—poor fools who rush to the bar of the Eternal Court of Justice. We should not be human were we not racked with pity for them, did we not strain every nerve to help them through their just but terrible punishment, remembering fearfully that we might have been the same—"

"Come, that's too much!" cried the squire, rising heavily from his chair and striking his riding-whip upon the floor. "I don't say that I was better than other young men in my day, nor worse. But, when I went of my own free will, and swore to cherish Dame at that communion-table in the parish church, I knew an oath was an oath, and begad I kept it! I don't say as I haven't chucked a chambermaid under the chin, nor kissed a rosy-cheeked gal or so under the mistletoe; but it's all been fair and above-board, and in good part, and I've got no call to be ashamed of a chuck or a kiss—no, not one on 'em. And, if madam had had a spy-glass that could see right into my heart, she'd never have seen naught to fret her. So, when a rogue coolly leaves my gal for a play-actress whose gallantries are public talk, I feel that I couldn't even sully a sword of mine with his dirty blood. He's only fit to be kicked into the pig-trough by the herd, and if you don't feel the same, I pity ye—I pity ye—that's all!"

"I feel as you would wish me to feel," said the Rector, intercepting the squire as he turned to leave him. "Come, old friend, what can I do? Shall I break the news to dear Lilian?"

The squire gradually allowed himself to be pacified. He had come to ask the Rector to break the news of her husband's death to Mrs. Drew; but he had many stipulations to make.

"Understand—no more of your Bible or your Gospel now—here!" he insisted. "You'll have me bound and at your mercy on Sunday morning, and then you may pepper me with it as long as you like, and I can't say you nay."

Then he laid down his law, which was that Mrs. Drew was to be told the bare fact of her husband's death, and that his circumstances and position at the time of his death were to be suppressed. She

was never to be told of the woman and her children, who were designated by the squire in words that he would scarcely have used had ladies been present.

The Rector listened, and shook his head.

"You yourself made me Lilian's guardian in the event of your death," he said resolutely; "and I am trustee of her marriage-settlement. At least as her pastor, if not as her guardian and trustee, I may be treated with confidence. No good ever came of the willful suppression of truth; of that I am so certain that nothing would induce me to keep one circumstance from Lilian. She is no child; in a few weeks she will be thirty-four; I shall tell her all."

The squire argued, fumed; but the Rector was obstinate.

"Then you must take the consequences!" said the squire, at last, flinging himself out of the room and out of the house. "I shall not! It is madness, foolery—abject foolery!"

"I am ready to take the consequences," said the Rector, offering to help the squire to mount the cob, which, as if he suspected his master's humor, stood meekly waiting at the garden gate, mute apology in his attitude.

But the squire pettishly pushed aside Mr. Rawson's helping hand, mounted, and rode off, without so much as a parting salute.

The position was too serious for the Rector to feel affronted; he went back thoughtfully to his study, locked himself in, read and reread the unfortunate woman's letter, and pondered deeply.

"It is the most peculiar matrimonial situation that has come in my way," he thought. "How will she take it? One can never be sure where women are concerned. She has not a passionate temperament, she knows nothing of the throes and agonies of impulse. Perhaps, if she had been less equable, they would have got on together better—who knows? He was enthusiastic, but not frivolous—not bad exactly, I think—stormy and desperate rather, like his daughter Lilith. Well, it is a shocking affair—revolting—against precedent—difficult to deal with, and the worst is that it must be dealt with at once."

The Rector roused himself, and forced himself to resume his sermon; for that afternoon Lilian Drew must be told by him not only that she was actually a widow, but that her only child Lilith was not the only child of the dead Captain Drew.

CHAPTER III.

THE squire went off and rode about the estate to avoid meeting his daughter and Lilith at luncheon. The two had been packing all the morning, assisted by their maid Mary, while old Madam Ware had sat by, interested, making her little remarks and suggestions, and unselfishly subduing her heart-ache, the sadness she had struggled with since she knew that her darlings—who were her life's sunshine—were going away from the Hall for an unlimited time.

It was no unusual circumstance for the squire to be absent at luncheon, so his womenfolk were not concerned when he failed to appear. Lilith was to ride over to say good-by to her young friends

the Grahames at Withers Court—a great house about seven miles away. Mrs. Drew watched her ride off; she was looking out of the painting-room window.

Lilith's thin ungainly figure and high shoulders showed to disadvantage on horseback; and, as she turned back to wave farewell to her mother with her riding-whip, there was such an apish look about her black eyes and irregular features under the shock of dark hair that Mrs. Drew was irresistibly reminded of the time when her father used to come in and noisily demand his "papoose."

She turned away and sat down with a sigh before her easel. The idea, the memory of her husband, filled her with gentle distress and a calm well-bred horror; yet she admired him as much in thought now as she did on the night of her introduction to him at a military ball, when he fell head over ears in love with the pretty fairy in white tulle dotted with real daisies, and she, all blushes and shrinking timidity, repelled and encouraged him at one and the same time.

Yes, he had been her ideal of manly beauty. She had admired him when he used seemingly to fill their little drawing-room with his presence, standing there straight and tall in his uniform, drawing on his military gloves, his waving plume a fitting crown to his handsome features, as his valet buckled some loosened strap or adjusted a spur. She admired him even more in evening-dress, and would glance at him with half-fearful appreciation when, tired out, he sometimes fell asleep on the couch in her drawing-room. But her admiration was in some degree that which she would have given to a glorious wild beast, a sleeping lion, a caged tiger. Mrs. Drew was perplexed, if not frightened, by her husband's stormy restless moods. To her he seemed always in extremes. She could not understand him.

The very recollection of him was disturbing. Now she determinedly put his image away out of her thoughts, and, sighing, resumed her brush.

She was painting a miniature copy of a great artist's representation of the Master blessing the little children, as a parting gift to her old friend and pastor, Mr. Rawson. The colors were mixed on her palette, and she was busily working away at one of the sweet child-faces, when Mary opened the door and announced the Rector himself.

"Now this is scarcely fair," she said, with an amused little laugh. "You ought to have been taken to the drawing-room. No; I can't shake hands. Don't look at my pinafore! All my clean ones are packed. Lilith says I look like a big bruise, all green, blue, and yellow patches. But now you must look at my little picture, a copy I have been doing for you to hang over your study mantel-shelf, or anywhere else where you can find room. How do you like it?"

Mr. Rawson murmured conventional words of approval. He hardly knew what he was talking about. He felt—there was no denying the fact—cowardly—nothing more or less than cowardly.

It was a cruel task, a most unpleasant situation; and Mrs. Drew unconsciously made the position worse by her gentle gayety. As he stood listening to her prattle, it seemed to him that the tragic news he was burdened with was impossible, untrue, some hideous grim jest.

"Don't look so grave over it," said Mrs. Drew, sitting down before the picture and looking back at him over her shoulder. "I will tell you why I painted this for you—because I have always felt that in your kindness to the weak, the desolate"—her voice dropped—"you are so true a follower of the Master. Do you not think that the children here were symbolic, that they figured the tempted, the sinners, the unfortunate in life? I do. What is the matter?" she added suddenly, for the Rector had paled to an ugly ashen gray as she spoke these words, which went home so cruelly. "Dear Mr. Rawson, you are not well!"

She paused suddenly; her spirits fell unaccountably. She sat down, not before the easel this time.

"You have come with bad news," she said slowly, huskily. It was an assertion, rather than an inquiry.

"I have," said the Rector desperately—"I have; but I would rather tell you in the presence of your dear mother."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "Don't you know how much worse it is to listen with others suffering? Thank Heaven Lilith is not here! Don't mistake—I know what it is! He is dead!"—and she threw herself aside upon the arm of the little sofa she was sitting on, her head buried in her hands.

The Rector rose and laid his hand gently upon her head. But she jerked it away with a "Don't speak!" So he stood, gazing silently at her motionless figure, wondering almost stupidly how he was to tell the rest of his tale.

Presently she raised her face, flushed, tearful.

"He did not—kill—himself?" she asked.

"Thank Heaven—no!"

Lilian's head went down upon her folded arms again. How curious it all was, he thought—the gay furniture of the little room, the easel, the paintings and sketches, the sunshine pouring in upon the stained floor, the faint sound of blown and rustling branches, of a triumphant hen cackling her success in the poultry-yard, of servants' laughter and gossip!

The rector had seldom had the incongruities of human life forced so roughly upon him.

"He did not kill himself. Was it—a duel?"

As Mrs. Drew asked her piteous question, the Rector seated himself near her. She stretched out her hands to him, as a frightened child might; and, gently and soothingly grasping those poor trembling hands, he told his tale, avoiding the mention of Lilian's rival as much as possible.

"She was—with him—when—it happened?" asked Mrs. Drew.

Mr. Rawson bowed his head.

"I am glad!" she sighed. "I felt, when they went away, that he would be happier—she would understand him; I never could!"

The Rector felt slightly embarrassed. This was a curious case. As Mrs. Drew had absolutely ignored her marital woes all these years, people had almost begun to forget her position of deserted wife, and to look upon the affair more as one of those mutual separations by consent which were the business of none except those immediately concerned. Even the Rector could not guess whether Lilian Drew hated the man who had forsaken her, or whether she

had forgiven him, or was indeed indifferent to the handsome captain who had once said "I will" so heartily in response to his inquiry from the communion-rails of Heathside parish church.

Now, when she spoke thus, he felt startled. She was glad her rival was with him when he died! Was this the extreme of magnanimity, or was it self-reproach?

He seated himself near her. He did not know what to say. She was gazing sadly, absently at the open window, where the green chestnut-boughs outside waved against a bright blue sky.

"He was—he looked so strong," she said, in low awed tones. "I could not have believed—he would die—so young. And I—I never said, 'Heaven bless you!' How hard! He would have liked that. I am sure at the last he thought of me—of Lilith. Oh, poor Lilith, your father is dead!" Her head went down again; she sobbed. The self-contained Mrs. Drew had broken down as completely as the weakest, the most emotional of her sex.

"Lilian, you are a downright good woman, and Heaven will reward you," said the Rector feelingly. "How ever that poor fellow could leave you so heartlessly is a mystery to me."

"It is no mystery to me, Mr. Rawson," rejoined Mrs. Drew, struggling to regain her composure. "Do you mind listening? No? Then I will tell you exactly how it was. When I met Reginald, I was very young—only just out. He dazzled me; his courtship seemed too wonderful to be true. It was all a fairy tale, and my one feeling was that I must wake up and find our engagement a dream. No one offered any objections, as you know. His father and my parents allowed a short engagement—he was so impetuous, few could resist him. I had not recovered from my bewilderment at this sudden strange fate which had come to me when I found myself married, the obedient subject of this winning, attractive, excitable man. Strong? He did not seem to know what fatigue meant. Our honeymoon was spent in a rapid race through Europe. We were up at dawn, seeing sun-rises, then rushing through picture-galleries and churches till I was breathless and almost brainless with the hurry and flurry. I found out that, if I did not take an active part in all that he was interested in, he was disappointed, disgusted. So I concealed my exhaustion as far as I could, intending to recruit my strength when we got home. Fallacy! Home was worse. He was bored, and looked to me to amuse him. He was much at home, and he was fond of playing the lover, and would expect to lounge about with me, and have long conversations on his favorite subjects, long lovers' talks, when I saw he expected me to be not only poetically passionate, but to exalt his already exalted ideas. I soon learned that intellectually he was far above me; I also learned the bitter truth that he had loved, wooed, and won an ideal woman, not me—ordinary, commonplace Lilian Ware. My health gave way. The doctor said I must on no account keep late hours. But all our friends gave entertainments in our honor, and I literally dared not stay away. I also dared not show how ill I felt, for nothing irritated him so much as my looking pale and tired, poor fellow! He used to try hard to give me pleasure. He would surprise me with boxes for the Opera or the theaters, which I had to thank him for as if I liked them. Liked them? Sometimes I would faint

when I was dressing; I fought faintness in the hot atmospheres. Once I did faint away quietly in my chair, and recovered to find him thoroughly out of temper, saying, 'Everything I do to try to please you is a failure,' *et-cætera, et-cætera.* Do you not see that he was right from his point of view?" said Mrs. Drew, pausing as she saw a frown on the Rector's brow.

He hesitated a moment; then he said—

"Your husband was a selfish man."

"Then I was a selfish woman," returned Mrs. Drew—"you will hear. The very next day after my faintness at the Opera he offered to leave me at home. There was a great dinner-party at General Somebody's. I could hardly believe in my good fortune. I exerted myself to be bright and lively till he had gone; then I went to bed. How thankful I was! It was like a reprieve! But I see now how wrong I was to give way to passing sensations of weakness. His going out alone led to his rejoining his bachelor friends, his old fast set. These reproached him with having an invisible wife, a useless companion, as single men will rally their married friends. He assumed the character of the careless husband, the man who had made a *mariage de convenance,* and had merely been keeping up appearances—how false this pretense was I know only too well! Mr. Rawson, I am incapable of feeling an infatuation such as his was for me. Well, his boon companions took him at his word. There were the old racketings—orgies.

"Then he began to have a craze for theater-going. As I began to recover my strength, I asked him to take me to see—to see"—Mrs. Drew shivered—"a new actress people were raving about. Oh, how well I remember that scene! He was standing with his back to me—he remained as if turned to stone. I thought he could not have heard me, and asked him again.

"He inquired, leaning his elbow on the mantel-shelf and his forehead on his arm, if I really meant it. His voice sounded stifled and odd; and I at once thought, with a pang of self-reproach, that he had felt my want of interest in his pleasures very keenly. I repeated warmly that I was longing to see this lovely creature that people seemed so wild about.

"'Very well,' he said, in the same dull, strange way.

"That very night he brought me a box for the theater. I think I never admired anything or anybody so much as I did that woman. She was delicate and small, but her majesty of movement, her grace, her passion, the deep grave sweetness of her voice, accounted for all the public enthusiasm. One of my husband's friends, who came into the box and devoted himself to me with a curious sort of apologetic respect, assured me, while Reginald was out of the box, that it was a settled fact that Miss Elvin would shortly become Duchess of Perth. He seemed very anxious that I should accept a rumor I was not at all disinclined to believe—for, innocently enough, I told my husband when we were at home again that, if Nature had planned a queen, it was this beautiful actress.

"He was sulkily silent; then, with an outburst of passion, he took me in his arms, kissed me frantically, and as frantically flung me from him. Luckily I fell on a sofa; meanwhile he had gone off,

and I did not see him again till the next morning, when he was all tender penitence for his roughness.

"'But I must ask one thing,' he said, in a vehement restless way —'that you won't speak to me again, Lilian, as you did last night.'

"Fool that I was—even then I had no suspicion! Lilith was born—yes, and Lilith was some months old before I knew.

"Reginald had settled down into a calm, common sort of good humor. There were no more transports or rages, for which I was stupidly thankful. He accepted Lilith's ugliness—yes; and I do believe he was fond of his 'papoose,' as he used to call her. But he was blinded by passion—poor fellow, he did not make his passions! Ah, don't look like that, Mr. Rawson—only Heaven can judge!

"Well, one day, when I was nursing Lilith, Reginald's colonel called. There was nothing strange in that. Colonel and Mrs. Wood often came, and Mrs. Wood had been most kind in sending me jellies and things when I was laid up. No; it was only the colonel's manner which made me think that something was wrong. He was a small man, with pale red hair and a white skin. He sat drawing his gloves on and off, looking at his white blue-veined hands as if he admired them, and nervously blinking and winking his large white eyelids till I almost laughed. Suddenly he stammered out something about this actress.

"'Is it true that you have seen her?' he asked.

"Of course I said 'Yes,' and I added much about her fascination of face, figure, speech, and manner until he colored, and abruptly cut me short by saying—

"'Of course you have not seen her lately?'

"I told him when it was. He seemed puzzled, worried, and embarrassed; then he began to talk of the object of his visit. He began about people's wicked habit of scandalizing and backbiting others. None could escape; sometimes the most wicked lies were told about persons who were as pure and spotless as the very angels themselves. This being the case, he would not conceal from me that my husband's name had been coupled with that of the popular actress Miss Elvin.

"'Oh, dear,' I said—and I laughed so heartily that the baby Lilith laughed too—'that is very funny! Only a little while ago Major Black said that the day was fixed for her marriage with the Duke of Perth. My husband—a married man too! How he will laugh!'

"The colonel at once bound me to silence where my husband was concerned. He assured me that what he said was strictly confidential; he left it to my honor not to repeat what he had said.

"'I have actually committed a breach of honor in your interest, Mrs. Drew,' he said, in great agitation. 'You are in duty bound to stand by me.'

"I assured him that my husband and I had no secrets from each other—that this concealment would be the first cloud in our marriage sky.

"The colonel stared: then he winced and wriggled and mumbled something about the beauty of confidence between husband and wife, how exceptional it was, and how glad he was to find such a striking instance of so rare a state of affairs. At the same time he

advised me for my husband's sake to use my influence to persuade him to change to a certain regiment about to leave England.

"'Malta is not a bad climate,' he said. 'Ah, Mrs. Drew, I can read in your face that you think me a presuming meddler! But don't,' he went on pleadingly; 'I beg and entreat you not to disregard my advice. We all like you and your husband, and wish so very, very much to see you safely out of harm's way—scandal, I mean. Now have patience with me, and, if any complications should arise, remember that my wife and I are ready to serve you both—night or day.'"

Toward the end of her story Mrs. Drew's voice had faltered. As she repeated the good colonel's words, she looked away; then she added, with short dry sobs—

"The next time I saw--the colonel, he had come to tell me they were gone."

"And to-day I have come to tell you that the man you excuse with such—such extraordinary generosity—a man who broke his marriage-vow as lightly as he would snap a thread—a man who ruined two women for a passing whim—is dead," said the Rector. "Before now eternal justice has judged him once and for all. It is not for a weak mortal like myself to comment upon his short life. Heaven is just! You, the injured one, are safe from the bitter future which awaits the wretched woman who tempted your husband."

"What?" Mrs. Drew looked at him with piercing inquiry. "Tell me—all. I can bear it—indeed I can! Do you know," she said, with a faint smile, wearily pushing back her smooth fair hair, "I really do not think I feel as keenly as other people. I have seen my father, my husband—yes, and Lilith—rage and fret over things which I should have thought to be absurd trifles. I have felt grieved, oppressed, unhappy; but I don't know the sensations 'cut to the quick,' 'pierced to the very soul,' and those things. You may talk to me just as you like; you need not spare me as you would others."

The Rector hesitated. He had not intended to place the woman's letter in the hands of Captain Drew's lawful wife. But he had felt so indignant while Lilian was defending her dead husband's sin—had felt such a species of impatient wonder how it was that good-for-nothing fellows, without a conscience, without a trace of moral stamina, were loved, petted, forgiven, and after death apotheosized by their womenfolk, while honest good men were so often worried, teased, snubbed, and, when gone, considered a good riddance—that his courage suddenly rose, and, before he quite realized the step he had taken, he had silently handed Mrs. Drew her rival's letter.

"That will explain all," he said; then, with a qualm, he walked away from Lilian and stood looking out at the window.

It seemed an age that he listened to the rustling of the flimsy letter-paper. Mrs. Drew must be reading the letter again and again. What would be the effect upon her? Would she sob and wail as he had seen women do, or would she turn against the memory of that man?

He did not wonder long. There was a tap on his arm. Mrs. Drew's face was paler and drawn; but her eyes were alight with determination.

"This is most important," she said. "It is terrible!" She leaned her arms on the window-sill, and looked out with an intent searching gaze. She could not have told what it was she saw, although her eyes wandered over the sunlit slopes and seemed to dwell upon each full-blossomed tree that cast its shadow on the reddening corn or on the tall grass in the hay-fields. She was mentally reviewing her duties—her hard stern duties—that paraded themselves unflinchingly before their firm yet gentle captain.

"You know the general has literally nothing—at least, so little that it is nothing for a man in his position—besides his pension," she said, as if continuing her thoughts aloud. "What will they do—starve? Oh, Mr. Rawson, he can never for one moment have expected this—have dreamed of his dying! It is so horrible!" she said, lowering her voice and laying her hand upon his sleeve. "You understand? It seems so unnatural that Lilith should have a brother and sisters—his children, but not mine! And those poor things—why, I am their step-mother! Yet I am not—oh, what a confusion!"

"My dear, pray do not let us disgrace ourselves by such a discussion," put in the Rector, in dismay. "I do not know what I can have been thinking of to show you that woman's letter. You must not talk or think about it—you must not indeed. Your father will be justly angry with me. I promise you I will see that these persons are provided for by those they have a claim upon. They have not the faintest shadow of a claim upon you—less than Hagar and Ishmael had upon Sarah—"

"Stop!" said Mrs. Drew decidedly. "That Bible story could not have been told after the life of the Master. I have lived after Him. I have to follow Him in my poor little way through anguish, agony, and death. But we all deserve to suffer, and He did not. Oh, Mr. Rawson, don't think I should not enjoy hating those people! That very fact is the reason I must watch my conduct toward them as I would watch a suspected person."

"I am not going to allow you to be quixotic and wrong-headed—yes, wrong-headed," said the Rector, surprised, and still more in dismay. "You must do nothing without consulting me, and probably your father."

"There is Lilith!" cried Mrs. Drew. "Oh, my Lilith! How little she knows—dreams— Now, Mr. Rawson, I have never yet spoken to Lilith about her father, nor do I intend; but I intend to place the situation before her, and I tell you I shall be guided by her impressions. You are prejudiced. Don't deny it; you must be; your duty as my trustee is to see that I am righted. But Lilith—oh, she has such a simple upright soul! She goes straight on through obstacles, if only she feels justified. There is her step in the passage."

CHAPTER IV.

LILITH opened the door, shut it, and then stood there in her riding-habit.

"So you are here," she said abruptly to the Rector. "Mother, you are troubled about something. Is it grandpapa? I met him in

five-acre field. He looked bad; but really I think it is only the hay-machine," she added, looking closely and suspiciously at her mother. "He had been greatly put out about it. They had brought it up alongside, and there it was steaming away at the corner of the hay-field, with them all standing round, staring at it as if considering whether the hay was to brought to it or it taken to the hay. It was enough to annoy grandpapa. But he is down-stairs now; and Barnes has brought him up some cold beef and some Burton No. 1. He'll forget all about the machine presently.

The Rector gave a side-glance at Mrs. Drew, wondering how she would open fire; she did not wait long.

"Lilith dear, the Rector has come to tell us that one of our dearest relatives, by marriage, is dead," she said slowly.

"Any one I know?" interrogated Lilith, fixing her searching eyes, after one swift glance at her mother, upon the Rector, as if she not only knew as much as he did, but a great deal more.

"It is not a friend," began Mr. Rawson hesitatingly. "You—you do not know—I mean have not recently seen him."

"Then it is an enemy?"

"My dear child, ask your mother."

"I could have told you, without asking her, that an enemy was dead," said Lilith, taking off her hat. "She looks it. You want to know why? Then you haven't felt hate. Somebody I hated once died—well—suddenly—all deaths seem sudden. I shall never forget it—all my unkind thoughts and sayings seemed to shower down and burn into me. I would have given anything to turn them into sweet words; but that can't apply to you, dearest," she said, with tender fervor, going to her mother, kneeling down, and kissing her hands. "Mother can say telling things that go home to you, Mr. Rawson; but unkind—she couldn't be that if she tried. So, mother dear, you needn't fret over this man's death—I think you said it was a man?" she added, with a glance back at the Rector which was not absolutely free from suspiciousness.

"Yes," answered the Rector seriously.

"It is a man, Lilith," said her mother, "who has died and left young helpless relatives, alone, poor, without any one to care for them."

"They have no claim whatever upon your mother, Lilith," began the rector eagerly. "And I have been preaching to her that she must really not be quixotic, and shower benefits upon unworthy persons."

Lilith shrugged her shoulders impatiently. They were treating her as if she were a baby. Yet she had suspected, from the moment her sharp eyes caught sight of the black-edged envelope the squire thrust into his pocket at the breakfast-table, that the mysterious father who must not be mentioned, but who lived in her memory as some striking beautiful dream might have lived, had gone into the silent land where neither words, thoughts, nor feelings could reach him. From the instant she confronted those two—the Rector and her mother—the suspicion became a certainty.

"Have these people no one to help—to support them?" she asked the Rector, in the rough abrupt way which people so particularly disliked in "that ugly girl, the squire's grandchild."

"That I shall make it my business to find out," said the Rector. "Nor will I leave a stone unturned, Lilith, to find responsible persons to prevent your mother from squandering her savings, as I see she has a mind to do."

Then he took his leave, feeling, as he rode home, that, if ever a man had bungled over a delicate piece of business, he was that man.

"But a foreknowledge of woman was absolutely necessary," he mentally acknowledged to himself; "and that I certainly have not. I never expected Lilian to take the news in that way. Who would have expected it? And as for Lilith—she is not like a girl. She is uncanny—positively uncanny!"

Meanwhile Mrs. Drew had delicately placed the situation—at least in part—before her daughter. Were it her plain duty to help her husband's children, their scheme of going to London must be given up. There would be a sacrifice. Breaking the contract with the owner of the London house would bring compensation to him, as well as the loss of the premium paid. But there would still be the remainder of Mrs. Drew's savings, and these would go to help the unfortunate family. Lilith asked no questions; but she entirely approved her mother's generosity.

"As for my visit to town, that can wait," she said cheerfully. "I dare say it is all for the best. This next year's study of nature may help me on more than all the other years put together. I have felt lately that I have seen more in nature than I ever saw before—that my eyes are just beginning to open. Other studies can wait."

And she gallantly supported her mother's sacrificial plans. The girl clung to duty as to a rock. With all and through all her wild dreams of life, of the world around their little secluded bower, there was a feeling of insecurity, of danger. When she disliked her duties, yet faithfully did them, she felt safer. That feeling of safety led her to subdue her violent nature, to plod on quietly, instead of storming through life like a whirlwind. It helped her to be patient. Lilith's patience was a dangerous sort of patience; people suspected it. That quiet acceptance of ordinary life, those quiet manners, were like the smooth exterior of a bomb-shell, the sloping grassy sides of a volcanic hill. There were nine hundred and ninety-nine chances that the latent explosives would remain latent. But there was the ugly thousandth chance that they would not. And people had an uncomfortable feeling, when they saw Lilith's fierce eyes, that she might treat them to an outbreak of some sort, and that the outbreak would not be pleasant.

After her talk with her mother, Lilith went into the shrubbery. She sought a quiet favorite nook. There was a small stone obelisk on a grassplot; green with the damp, for thick yews stood close together around, and their tough branches crossed each other overhead, and tall elms towered above these, so that few sun-rays ever glinted upon the verses inscribed upon the obelisk—verses Lilith knew by heart, that began—

"Far from the busy haunts of men."

This cool twilight scarcely ever failed to calm her. Now she fled hither with various emotions raging. Lilith had to struggle just now against wind and tide.

"He is dead—of that I am absolutely certain," she said, leaning against a yew-trunk and folding her long arms upon her chest.

What did she remember of him? Merry laughter, caresses, and her fingers clasped in his hair—some perfume too, and kisses. As she thought back, these impressions grew stronger. No distinct face or form would stand out—it was all dim; but these sensuous impressions awakened a feeling—half longing, half bitter regret—as the hungry feel who awake to find their vision-banquets a cheat of Nature, or the poverty-stricken, who have reveled in gold and jewels in their dreams, awaken, still social criminals, paupers.

"Why did he leave us?" was her bitter cry. All these years she had been fatherless. Her grandfather had been good; but still there had been an emptiness, a void. And once she had found a pencil-sketch of her father, asleep, drawn by her mother. Such a face and head—so noble, with such a sweet expression on the sleeping face! She had crept away, and had indulged in a wild fit of crying. Then she fancied there might be a chance of her parents "making up."

Now there was none—none; he was dead! Her mother had told her that these near relatives of their mutual near relative had been dearly loved by the dead man.

"And they have nothing; they depended upon him," she said. "If he knew they were destitute, starving, his poor dead body might well turn in its grave!"

The words impressed Lilith's imagination. Now, as she stood by the yew-tree, she imagined her father's still white features as he lay stiff and straight in his grave. Then there seemed a dead silence, till out of it came heart-broken sobs and wailings—the voices loved by the poor helpless dead crying to him, till his life came faintly back, and he writhed in agony. It was an awful picture that confronted the young artist's mind; but she bore its presence bravely, only crying mentally—

"Rest, poor soul! I swear that these who cry out shall be mine. I will share with them—I will see that they do well; but do not come to me like this! I pray Heaven to bless you!"

The species of vision was gone. Lilith felt chill; she rubbed her eyes, which seemed stiff and filmy; then she went back thoughtfully to the house, and into the library. Here she wrote to Mr. Rawson.

"MY DEAR GODFATHER,—I quite agree with my mother that these helpless people are dependent upon us and nothing would induce me to accept now the tiniest trifle paid for by mother's savings. These savings, like any one else's savings, belong by right to those who have never had anything to save. This is my Communism, which you have so often laughed at me for; but what a privilege it is for those who have saved money by denying themselves things, as mother has! Mother said that she told you she meant to take my advice because I was so ignorant. She thoroughly believes in the 'babes and sucklings' text. Love to dear Mrs. Rawson, Kate and Moll, from your affectionate godchild, LIL."

A man on horseback took the letter. The Rector met him in the

lane, and read Lilith's letter as he walked his cob along the heavy wagon-ruts under the spreading elms.

He had seldom been so near a round honest oath. As he took off his soft hat, ruffled his snowy hair, and resentfully banged his head-gear down upon his head again, the temptation to call himself a deuced fool was almost irresistible.

"I—I have no worldly wisdom whatever," he said. "I meant well; but this business is immoral—simply immoral."

He thought hard during his ride about the parish. The Gospel, as explained by him to the sick and aged that day, was a very stern Gospel indeed. He knew that it behooved him to be stern, for he felt as if sin had been running a race with him, and that sin had won.

"I will talk to Mary about it," was his final determination. He wished he had asked his wife's advice at first.

Mrs. Rawson was a pleasant plump little woman, thrifty, a good housekeeper and manager, and kind to her husband's poor and sick. She herself had been a clergyman's daughter, and had lived through rectory life before, which perhaps accounted for the total absence of glamour about her notions of ministering life. She was intensely practical, and so accurately just in her metings out of food, clothing, or other help to claimants for rectory bounty, that on occasion the Rector had been known to plead himself on behalf of some case which had touched his heart. "But," as Mrs. Rawson warned her daughters, "my dears, it is the greatest possible mistake to be lavish to a single case, when a dozen others far more deserving may crop up immediately afterward, and we should have nothing to give them." She was so determined to be a just steward that, when the Rector came to her as she sat in her little parlor at needlework, flicking his riding whip and pacing about in an embarrassed absent way, she set her lips firmly and stitched away in a vigorously-resolved manner which boded ill for sentiment.

"My dear, I want your advice," began the Rector, sitting down at the little dining-table opposite to his wife and her huge work-basket.

"If it is about that miserable old man who will go on living in that damp hut, and will not go into the Union, I have only to repeat what I have said before," said Mrs. Rawson, unreeling her thread with a jerk. "It is most unjust of him to take money from that poor pale thing, his daughter, with all those children and that rough brute of a husband. I feel sure that husband of hers beats her whenever she ekes out anything for that selfish old father. It isn't as if the Union was a miserable hole, instead of a well-built building standing high and dry, with a south aspect for the old people's rooms, and beds of flowers and rolled graveled walks for them to look at."

"It is not old Healey I wanted to speak to you about," said the Rector, drumming his fingers on the table. "You and I differ about the workhouse, so I should not talk to you about it. Every time an honest old fellow who has known better days, and has struggled and done his best, has to acknowledge that he is beaten, and goes upon the parish, my heart aches; for I know that such things ought not to be, and I can do nothing. No; I wanted your advice about Mrs. Drew and Lilith. Captain Drew is dead."

"What a blessed riddance! But his death—it was not so disreputable as his life? He had left that woman?"

"No, he had not," said the Rector; and then he rapidly told his tale, up to the point where he broke the news to the widow, Mrs. Drew.

The work dropped from Mrs. Rawson's hands; she stared at her husband almost incredulously.

"No wonder the poor old squire talked so loud this morning!" she remarked. "No wonder, poor old man, he staggered out and rode away without so much as a look at any of us! But how the general should have brought himself to send that—that shocking creature's letter to the squire—that I cannot understand; he must be either mad or lost to all sense of shame."

"What ought he to have done then?" asked the Rector. His wife was throwing an unexpected light upon the subject.

"Done? Why, destroyed the indecent letter, and have said nothing about the way he heard of his son's death to any one!"

"But those victims—the children?"

"We cannot alter the laws of the Almighty, although some of us are arrogant enough to wish to do so on occasion," said Mrs. Rawson, recovering from her shock of surprise, and resuming the hemming of one of the dark cotton pinafores which she had introduced as a species of badge or uniform for the National School girls. "How often have I heard my dear father refer to that text about the sins of the father being visited on the children—"

"You would make the Almighty out worse than a Nero!" said the Rector, springing up from his chair, and from that moment siding heart and soul with Lilian Drew and her peculiar child Lilith. "Pray, may I ask what you would have done, in Lilian Drew's case, when you read that letter?"

"Why, you don't mean to say that that poor dear heard anything about that letter?" said the shocked Mrs. Rawson. "What—who could forget himself to that extent? Not the squire!"

"My dear, I placed the letter in Mrs. Drew's hands myself," answered the Rector; and then he talked on, explaining his opinions about the truth, how it should be told when necessary, unpalatable or not.

Mrs. Rawson, after a choke and a gasp, found breath to answer her husband's question, as to what she would have done in Mrs. Drew's position.

"Done?" she indignantly exclaimed. "Why, have considered your conduct a desperate insult! Have forgiven you in secret—at least, tried to; but you would not have seen or spoken to me in a hurry!"

"But the woman and her children?"

"Put them out of my mind as soon as possible—forget that such creatures ever existed, if I could."

"You would not devote the careful savings of years to educate and keep the children as their dead father struggled to educate and keep them, I suppose?"

"I do not think such a dreadful thing a matter to jest upon," said Mrs. Rawson severely.

"Oh, you prefer earnestness, Mary? You shall have it," said

the Rector, who was strangely chilled and pained by his wife's words. "Although I don't think you will like to hear this bit of truth, you, my wife, are inferior in heart and soul to Lilian Drew and her daughter Lilith."

And he seized his riding-whip, and went out to cogitate how Lilith could go to London with the least expense and the greatest safety.

"For the child must have her strict dues," he determined.

Mrs. Rawson felt hurt at her husband's reproach.

"He ought not to have chosen me if he did not approve of my ideas of right and wrong," she proudly assured herself.

She considered it below her dignity to give any hint of the state of affairs at Heathside Hall to her daughters. She only said almost jealously to Kate, who wrote little tales and verses for children's magazines—

"I wish you would persuade your father to write, Kate. Oh, I don't mean because of any addition to his income! It is because he has the poetical temperament, and that is such a fatal drawback to a clergyman's life, which should be logical, practical, unless the poetry flows from his mind harmlessly through its proper channels —pen and ink."

CHAPTER V.

THE Rector had two sisters living in that quaint part of London which lies about and around King Square. King Square was large and open, with a broad road encircling the big square garden; but Prince's Square, which lay behind it, had tall brick mansions with long narrow windows which had been built in Queen Anne's time. Here lived Mr. Rawson's sisters—Mrs. Law, who had married her husband, now an infirm old gentleman, late in life, and Mrs. Macdonald, a widow with one son.

Mrs. Law was the lady of the house, and to Mrs. Law the Rector wrote to inquire whether any lady of her acquaintance would consent to take charge of Lilith Drew for a few months.

"You may have seen the death of Captain Drew in the papers," he wrote. "This does not make any pecuniary difference to Mrs. Drew, who has money in her own right, and is Squire Ware's sole heiress; but it puts an end to Mrs. Drew's taking a house in town."

The Rector did not hint that his sisters might like to invite Lilith; but he thought there was just a possibility that it might occur to them to do so. And, as the days went on and no reply to his letter arrived, he augured well from the delay.

One morning came a letter from Mrs. Macdonald. She excused "dear Judith's" silence. Mr. Law had had one of his severe attacks, and Mrs. Law had enough to do to nurse him.

"We have been deeply interested in your young friend," wrote Mrs. Macdonald—"especially dear Judith, who used to paint flowers so beautifully. Judith thinks Miss Drew very young to handle the brush—she will doubtless have to undergo severe training with the pencil. However, in any case, Judith says that, if poor dear Mrs. Drew will trust her daughter to us, she will do everything in her power to direct and counsel her. Miss Drew must expect to find it

dull here with three old folk. However, my maid Eliza will quite like taking her out for walks, and I dare say Willie will try to find time to play a game of chess with her in the evenings."

Altogether the letter produced the impression of having been written in one of those square lofty rooms in Prince's Square, with the carved ceilings all flying Cupids holding flower-festoons, with the gilt bow-legged drawing-room chairs drawn up close to the pale walls, and the tiny tables and the old square piano equally slim and spiky in the matter of supports. It breathed old-fashioned primness—but old fashioned kindliness, thought the Rector, who thrust it into his breast-pocket. He was resolved not to speak to his wife about the Drews again; but he intended to ride over to the Hall with Mrs. Macdonald's letter directly after breakfast.

He found Lilith and her mother in the painting-room. They had painted vigorously while troublous thoughts and strange griefs were agitating their minds. Mrs. Drew expected to see the Rector, who was employing his solicitors to make all necessary inquiries about "Alicia Drew," as she called herself, and her children; and, as he came in, she looked up quickly, nervously—for, calmly as she behaved outwardly, there was terrible bitterness in her heart. Each time she discussed these persons who were so curiously introduced in her quiet life she felt as if a wound were opened afresh, and, when she walked across the church-yard, she almost envied those who lay under the tender grass and little white daisies. So each time the Rector brought no news she felt relieved; and on this day she looked up with a smile and showed him her sketches.

"Now you must look at Lilith's," she said. "I feel myself such a pigmy beside Lilith."

They walked to Lilith's easel She was hard at work, with her black brows knit. She was biting her under-lip—her hair was a shock of black "friz." She made a gesture to them to wait; then she settled herself upon her high chair and dabbed her brush restlessly first on the palette and then on her canvas.

Mrs. Drew and the Rector stepped aside.

"I cannot understand the way Lilith works," said her mother. "She seems to plunge her brush wildly into the paint, then give vicious dabs here and there, and out comes some extraordinary effect."

"Some painter ought to see her—what she does and how she does it," remarked Mr. Rawson; and then he produced Mrs. Macdonald's letter.

At first Mrs. Drew shook her head doubtfully.

"Lilith among strangers," she said—"she, so peculiar, so different from other girls? Oh, it would never do! They would lose patience; and that is the worst thing that could happen to her."

Mr. Rawson hastened to give an account of his sisters—they were so thoughtful, so conscientious. Judith—Mrs. Law—had so much feeling for art—she was quite an authority among her friends—they came to consult her in reference to taking down a volume of the "Britannica."

At that moment Lilith swung herself round weirdly, and cried that they were free to come and look, and say what they liked, for she cared nothing for anybody's opinion.

"People's opinions depend upon their tempers," she said. "I wouldn't give a farthing for a man's opinion if his wife had given him a dinner he didn't like, or if his principal shares were going down in the money market;" and then she began to clean her brushes.

The Rector had often seen Lilith's quaint fancies on the canvas; but there was startling power in this picture, which had been painted while Lilith was the prey of violent emotion. It was a pine forest. To right and left were giant trees, behind these was thick forest gloom. The scene was a small clearing—huge stones were grouped about. As one looked, one saw that they were shaped as creeping monsters—great toads with dark staring eyes, seals with grotesque faces, serpent-heads peeping leeringly and banefully from among the clumsier shapes.

The Rector recoiled, saying, "Oh, dear me!" and vaguely wondered whether Lilith had been properly—completely—confirmed. As her pastor and godfather, he did not like "the heathenish spirit of this thing." He liked it still less as, assuming his glasses, he saw that the clearing was alive with tiny creatures—dwarfs, but quite different from the ordinary dwarfs of the painters—boys with all the tricky ways of boys, wearing leaves like tunics belted at the waist with grass—boys' faces too; but the expressions on the faces were expressions that could have been wrought and stamped there only by hundreds of years of human passions.

That this girl, just fifteen, who had been baptized, carefully brought up, learning her catechism, her collects, epistles, and gospels on Sundays, who had been minutely prepared by him for confirmation, on whose head the good bishop of the diocese had laid his hands, and who had behaved with such Christian nobility in the late domestic misery, could sit down and paint such a diabolical-looking thing—the Rector could not understand it. He felt scared, shocked somehow.

"I did not know that we had any pines in the neighborhood," he began, dropping his glasses, and feeling unpleasantly that he should remember those dwarfs for a long time. "I recollect some Scotch firs on Hilton Hill; but those are genuine North German trees."

"I dare say they are," said Lilith gravely. "I did not go to them; they came to me, Mr. Rawson, in my dreams, and I made notes about the peculiar colors—I had not seen or used exactly that green before. And then those dwarfs—oh, they were amusing! I never heard creatures talk like that! They don't seem to have any ideas of our morality at all, though they seem to have a peculiar sort of morality of their own. Do you see those two on that bowlder?" Lilith pulled unwilling Mr. Rawson closer to the canvas. "Well, I saw them climb up that bowlder—how funny they looked!—and squat at the top, beginning a grave consultation. Down below on the moss was a sick dwarf—a sick dwarf seemed to be a very unusual thing. Twenty or thirty dwarfs sat round him in a ring, any one ready to fly at an instant's notice to get anything for their poor comrade. Now these two had fancied the sick dwarf asked for beer. They knew he liked beer, because they had often been beer-stealing with him on former occasions; but now there was a difficulty. I heard them wonder how they should get the beer brought to him. They had always made holes in the casks

with their tiny gimlets, and extracted beer by driving in a pierced fir-needle. Now they felt they must abstract a bottle. The bravery of those pigmies! The way they set out, leaped, scrambled, and made their way down to the town, overwhelmed me with admiration, as did the way they stole their bottle and rolled it uphill!"

"Lilith has been reading fairy-tales late at night," said Mr. Rawson. "Ah, she will not do that in London!"

He was determined that Lilith should have the chance of overcoming sickly fancies, so he left no stone unturned until all was arranged for her journey.

It was a beautiful July day when Mr. Rawson took his godchild to London. He rode over to the Hall in the early morning; they were to drive to the station, he and Lilith, alone, in the squire's dog-cart, luggage and all. This was by the girl's special desire. She wished to take leave of the Hall and her loved ones at the same time.

"I do not want to be haunted by two pictures," she said to her mother. "I shall always be seeing the old place—the garden, the hut, the stables, the poplars—when I shut my eyes. I don't want to be haunted by you and grandpapa standing on the platform and looking at me, sad and reproachful. I am going to London to work—and to work hard. Now to work hard is hard work, and I must not be home-sick—I have felt something like home-sickness in advance. I must not always want to paint your faces on every canvas."

Lilith had some vague notion of going direct from her wild spasmodic painting in her mother's "den" to some great artist's studio. Her mind was stored with legends of the youth of great artists—of one whose talent was discovered by his rude charcoal sketches on his whitewashed garret-walls; of another, Zuraban, "the mulatto of Murillo," who painted at the students' pictures early in the morning, and led to the students' belief that their master's studio was haunted by an occult "brownie," never suspecting that the actual "brownie" was their little "fag" the color-grinder and brush-cleaner; of Chantrey, whose first stroke of genius was the modeling in paste of a sow and her litter of pigs for the top crust of a pork-pie his mother was making; of many others, who had seemed merely to spread their wings and fly to the topmost pinnacle of fame. She had not read between the lines—she had not counted the years of struggle, of bitter disappointment, of cruel failures, whose memories were buried in the sensitive hearts of the great in art of whom those fanciful tales were told. Her art-world was like the world she had gazed at beyond the row of poplar-trees—if sometimes stormy, often a golden blaze, or a sea of glorious color—beautiful always, commonplace never.

She would not easily forget her last look—as ignorant child—of home—the gray-stone façade, still in shadow, for it was not nine o'clock; her grandmother standing just within the doorway, under the portico, smiling and waving her pocket-handkerchief whenever Lilith looked up from her high perch in the dog-cart; her grandfather, who seemed aged somehow since his daughter's trouble, talking with assumed cheerfulness to Mr. Rawson about the crops and the coming harvest; and her mother, who stood on the lowest step of the broad flight, slim and tall, in her plain black dress and

widow's collar, shading her eyes with her hand as she reminded Lilith of this and that in her thoughtful motherly way.

The luggage was packed in, Mr. Rawson drew on his gloves, the groom jumped up behind, the horse gave a spring, and dashed off. Lilith heard a faint "Heaven bless you!" then shouts and farewells from the maids who were crowding behind the gate into the kitchen-garden to wave their parting greetings to Miss Lilith, who was going away to London for some indefinite time, for some indefinite purpose; then the short excited barks of Watch, the collie, who was going with his young mistress to guard her in the great black city he had never seen. Then the road went through the shrubbery; the dew glistened on the leafy boughs in the morning sunlight, sweet odors of honeysuckle and fir-cones scented the pure air, the doves were cooing, now and then a hare or rabbit rustled and fled across the road, or Watch's bark startled a covey of partridges, and they flew up and away with a whir; then out into the park again, Lilith giving one last longing look back at the old stone house among the trees and the bracken, while the lodge-keeper's wife let them through the park gate, nearly upsetting the tiny child who clung to her skirts by her parting courtesy to her young lady as she did so; then—the world!

It was still home though, for this was the squire's land, and the ruddy corn beyond the hedges was the squire's corn. Then came the high-road, the station-yard with its rough flints, over which even the bay mare went more slowly; then, dismounting, Mr. Rawson at once took Lilith to the compartment the squire—a director of the loop-line of which Heathside was temporary terminus—had insisted on reserving for the journey, that Lilith might have Watch with her.

There were no tickets to take; so Mr. Rawson came in, and began to talk cheerfully about London; and this he did at intervals during the journey. He found Lilith's ideas of her temporary life in town confident, cheerful, but so vague that he grew somewhat puzzled before they arrived within the smoke-radius of the capital.

"I shall work in one of the studios, of course—the question is, which?" said Lilith decidedly.

Mr. Rawson, finding that Lilith meant the studios of the principal R.A.'s, ventured to propose the question whether these great men really allowed students to stand by and learn their secrets of style.

"It seems to me that I have not heard of their doing so," he said, in a conciliatory tone. "I myself—in my ignorance, doubtless—should fancy that, as so many of the successful painters of the day occupy special positions on account of their special manner, if they allowed rising talent the benefit of their discoveries and the result of their severe work, they would simply be like a king admitting others to reign with him coequally."

"All the great painters—Raphael, Titian, Leonardo, and the rest—taught—thought it an honor to teach their particular schools," said Lilith. "How else could they have continued to multiply masterpieces? Their pupils painted the coarser details. This is what I expect to do first. I know the painter, in my own mind, that I feel with and can learn from. I shall not like the work at first, but it will be everything to me."

"And how about drawing?" asked Mr. Rawson innocently.

"Drawing?" Lilith opened her eyes.

"My sister attended a drawing-school for years before she was allowed to use the brush," said the rector.

"I can draw anything I see."

"So could Judith. We all thought so too; but, when a master saw her drawings, he found fault with nearly everything, and put her back to the beginning."

Just then the train began to steam into a thicket of houses. The outlook was dismal—stacks of chimneys, dirty house-tops, broken windows, with slatternly women leaning out and scolding ragged children that were hopping about in the alleys below.

"If I have to begin at the very beginning, I will be brave," thought Lilith. "I will go through with it all patiently, step by step."

This resolve taken, she felt brighter. Then came the noise and confusion of the bustling terminus; but the roar and rush were soon in the past, and Lilith was driving through the London streets, Mr. Rawson at her side, in old Mr. Law's brougham.

The coachman, being accustomed to drive his invalid master and the timid ladies, managed the quiet horse leisurely, so that Lilith had time to look at the principal buildings.

"I should think that London could not be painted except in sepia or Indian ink," was her remark.

St. Paul's delighted her. But such a building, those columns and porticoes, under such a sky! It seemed to her to stand there mournfully, half black, half white, as if in widow's weeds, a silent warning to the restless crowd surging about its great walls of what this atmosphere was in which they lived and breathed.

The busy crowds bustling this way and that, so many men frowning and solemn, so many talking, a few, a very few smiling, was the most exciting sight to Lilith. She felt as if all these were her brothers, children of their common mother Nature, who urged them on, on in their different paths, all leading—whither?

She was going to work, to struggle; but why, and for what end?

Her philosophizing was over. After the coachman had carefully driven them through numberless narrow streets, they rolled into a quiet square. The horse trotted gallantly up to his master's door.

CHAPTER VI.

A QUIET spot. While Mr. Rawson alighted and knocked at the old-fashioned dark-green door with the quaint brass knocker, Lilith peeped out of window. Giant sycamores shaded the short dark turf in the square garden. There was a smutty statue on a broad pedestal; she saw a crown, scepter, and orb on this effigy, of a bulky dame, whom she afterward knew to be Queen Anne. Two or three toddling children played about a wooden bench where their nurses sat knitting; their little voices sounded shrilly in the silence. Lilith heard the horse's breathing, and a distant roar and rumble which was new and strange, the restless friction of a great city.

Then the house door opened—there was a sound of cheerful

voices. Lilith saw two ladies and a maid in a mob-cap coming out upon the door-step, exchanging greetings with the Rector.

"Come, my dear," he said at the carriage window, opening the door and bending his arm for Lilith to lean upon. "My sisters are quite anxious to see you."

Lilith was kissed and embraced by two ladies in caps; then she found herself in a square hall, which reminded her of home, with its old oaken furniture, black and white marble flooring, and the giant clock ticking solemnly in the corner.

Up the wide shallow staircase, past the broad window-seat with its dark-blue cushions at either end, one of the ladies led Lilith gently, almost apologetically. There was an open book upon the broad seat under the stained glass window.

Lilith's conductor stopped short, pounced upon and with some difficulty pocketed the tiny but bulky volume.

"That is my boy Willie," she whispered to Lilith; "it is so lucky I saw it. My sister, Mrs. Law"—looking back—"his aunt, you know, objects to untidiness, also to poetry—at least, wild poetry. Of course I don't mean Longfellow's 'Psalm of Life,' and some of Sir Walter Scott's ballads, and Schiller, and 'In Memoriam:' but she does not think wild poetry good for young people, you know."

Lilith gave a quick look back. Mr. Rawson and Mrs. Law were slowly ascending the staircase, talking earnestly in a low voice.

She gave a short sneering little grimace. She often made those ape-like grimaces without knowing it. Mrs. Macdonald stared in dismay at the tall dark girl with the strange angry eyes and the unkempt mass of frizzly hair. She was still more in dismay when the unconventional creature said—

"Then Mrs. Law and I shall never get on—that is clear. I might as well get into the carriage, drive back to the station, and be off home again."

"My—my dear," stammered the startled Mrs. Macdonald, "pray consider—here they are! Of course you are agitated, leaving home and your dear mother, and all that."

Mrs. Macdonald, a fair woman with a certain wistful prettiness and a kindly but submissive manner, grew pale. She was almost as much startled as when an Irish maid, whom both she and Mrs. Law had considered a most respectable and valuable servant, returned one night from a Fenian gathering, red as a rose with enthusiasm, and huskily, albeit somewhat unsteadily, intent upon her ladies' speedy removal from this troublesome world to a calmer sphere by means of a carving-knife.

"My dear, it doesn't matter one bit what you say to me, you know, as I always tell Willie—and you are young like Willie. But you must be careful with dear Judith—Mrs. Law, you know—she is so clever, so remarkable. I may say that she has always been like a queen among us since early childhood."

Lilith looked at Mrs. Law, who had just turned the staircase corner, and who was glancing suspiciously at the tumbled cushions on the window-seat and severely thinking, "That boy again!" Mrs. Law stooped, as if from long habit of looking for others' defalcations. She wore a coarse black "front" under her big cap with the

bright flowers, and a dress made after the most useful pattern. She had a black silk apron with pockets.

"A queer sort of queen!" thought Lilith, as she noticed Mrs. Law's wrinkled face, shifting little eyes, and firm mouth. "She reminds me of a prison-gate."

Judith—Mrs. Law—happened to catch sight of Lilith's strange face, distorted by a look of distrust and disapproval, and her expression settled into sternness as she told herself she would never like that girl—she believed she was destined to be a worse trouble to her than her nephew Willie.

However, Mr. Rawson smoothed matters by asking Lilith whether she would not like to see Mr. Law before she went to her room; and Lilith, whose strongest feeling was that holiest one of all, pity, or compassion, gave such a hearty "Yes" that Mrs. Macdonald felt relieved, and began to hope that their young guest's good nature would be found almost to balance her eccentricity.

Mrs. Law cautiously opened one of the lofty oaken doors with the queerly-carved cornices—all fat playful Cupids and satyrs, and oak-branches where undraped nymphs were playing bo-peep—and the four passed in.

The drawing rooms were two large chambers thrown into one. The walls were painted in medallions. The square stiff ottomans and gilt chairs were covered with faded tapestry. There were slim marqueterie tables and tall cabinets; the window-curtains were primly caught up, and their folds stiffly arranged under the giant fringes and heavy gilt cornices. It was a room which made one think the present fashion of garments, the present manners and talk, out of place there. Lilith felt that, if she sat here alone, she would fancy stately minuets gracefully danced by the ghosts of by-gone inhabitants in shadowy sacques and powdered wigs, lace ruffles and high heeled shoes; and even now she turned away sharply from two great faded oil-paintings hung on either side of the high carved mantel-shelf—one a dandy with his hand on his hip, the other his lady, laced into her satin dress so tightly that her beau might have spanned her tiny waist with two of his long white fingers. Their eyes seemed to follow her, as if mutely asking with a sad *hauteur*, "And pray what may you be doing here?"

An old man with a fair withered face, long white hair which rested on his Indian dressing-gown, and a silken snowy beard was sitting in a high-backed arm-chair, propped and supported by cushions. Mr. Law was the sole living representative of the purest branch of an old English family. The young dandy in the picture was his grandfather, Sir Richard Law, Knight, and the tightly-laced lady was Dame Cecilia, his grandmother. Both were painted in their youth. This had been the family town-house when Prince's Square was the Belgrave or Grosvenor Square of the period. This present Richard Law had spent years of his youth and middle-age in India. Now he was poring over the "Wallahabad Gazette," which interesting journal he laid down on the table covered with chessmen, carved sandal-wood knick-knacks, colored figures of Indians, and jeweled daggers, which he kept near him as a sort of make-believe that his foster-country was not actually so far away.

He laid it down when his wife went toward him, saying shrilly close to his ear—

"My brother's young friend, my dear. Come to stay a short time."

"Ah, indeed!" said the old gentleman, in hushed quavering tones, which had become habitual since his deafness. "Your arm, my love. Thanks." And rising with much difficulty, he said, "I am glad to welcome you here, my dear, in this, our quiet English home. It is very different from Wallahabad; but you must try to make the best of it. Welcome to Prince's Square also, ever-welcome brother-in-law! No, my dear, I thank you, not yet"—in reproachful tones to his wife, who wanted him to sit down again—"not while a young lady remains unseated."

Then he gave Lilith an intent glance through his spectacles. He saw something about her which reminded him of the tropics.

"Our young friend has, perhaps, been to India?" he asked, with a pleased smile to Rawson.

"Don't laugh. He always asks every one that when he first sees them," said Mrs. Law sharply to Lilith.

As sharply replying, "I laugh?" she went up to the old man and said, her young clear voice barely raised—

"Not yet; but I hope to go. It must be a magnificent country."

The old man's face, which had the quaint beauty of a certain type of old age, grew radiant.

"Magnificent?" he repeated, tremblingly sinking into his chair. "What a country—what a country it was! Ah, the British flag has brought law perhaps; but never again can the splendor be what it was!"

Then he held forth about the native princes, their glory, their retinues, their gorgeous palaces, his visits to them, when at parting they would throw a jeweled chain hung with rubies and emeralds around his neck, as if those priceless gems were mere berries plucked from the trees. He was waxing more enthusiastic, and was even commencing to tell stories of the origin of some of the jeweled scabbards on his table, when his careful wife, who had been surveying the group with her quick restless little eyes, as a watchful cat might survey a distant group of mice, stopped her husband's discourse without much ceremony.

"Take Lily—not Lily? oh, thank you, Hugh! Lilith to her room, Mary, my dear," she said to her meekly-obeying sister.

Meanwhile her sharp ears had distinctly heard Lilith say to her brother, Mr. Rawson—

"He reminds me of the little Glassman. I shall paint him as the little Glassman standing on a knoll; his beard and hair are like spun glass, and will come out so well against the dark trunks of the forest trees!"

Lilith and Mrs. Macdonald disappeared. Mrs. Law settled her husband into his chair for a quiet perusal of the newly-arrived "Buddjapore Times;" then she turned to Rawson and asked him with much asperity what that was about some glass man.

"As a rule, I should not dream of purposely overhearing," she said, with some disdain; "but I confess myself disappointed in Lilith Drew. Bad blood will tell, I fear! Girls can scarcely be the

daughters of scoundrels without being tainted. As it is, it is only a case of bad taste. One would have thought that the girl intended me to hear her compare Mr. Law to a vender of glass."

Mr. Rawson hastened to correct Mrs. Law's natural mistake. He assured her that the glass man Lilith mentioned was a forest sprite, a good genius—the hero of a celebrated German tale, a translation of which he was constantly in the habit of reading at the entertainment given to the young people of the parish in the boys' school. Mrs. Law was aghast, horrified.

"Well," she said, nodding her head, "what your wife can be about, allowing you to read fairy tales to the boys and girls who will have to till the ground or enter domestic service, I can't imagine. Hugh, I thought better of you. When Christian ladies and gentlemen have written such exemplary tales of women who are up at five and get their daily duties over by nine, so that they may take in washing or go out charing to help their families, or of men who give up hot dinners on Sunday to keep the Sabbath—I say, when you read tales of fairies and fooleries, instead of these, whose lofty purposes must influence the lower class for good, I would not be in your place at the Judgment Day—that's all. I should know for a certainty that I should hear that awful word 'Goats!' when I dared to appear."

Hugh Rawson knew of old that it was useless to argue with Judith, so he good-humoredly changed the conversation; he had many commissions to execute in town; he would return, just for a few minutes, after their late dinner, to wish Lilith "Good-by."

It was more than dusk when he called in Prince's Square. Coffee was being served by the old man-servant in the drawing-rooms, which were dimly lighted by one or two shaded lamps and a few candles here and there.

Mrs. Law was reading aloud to her husband in his corner, Mrs. Macdonald sat close by doing some "evening work," embroidery or what not. As Mr. Rawson entered, he did not see Lilith; but he heard an amused laugh in the back drawing-room, and then another in a pleasant manly tone.

"Lilith and Willie playing chess," said Mrs. Macdonald deprecatingly. "I think chess such an intellectual, sensible game for young people."

"When they have the intellect and sense to play it as it should be played," put in Mrs. Law. "I confess that I am not in the habit of hearing laughter from chess-players. You might as well look for laughter at the whist-table. My dear, if Willie goes on at that rate, take part in the whist of this house he most assuredly shall not. He will have to go elsewhere if he wants to play."

The Rector tried to be agreeable to his autocratic sister. Lilith's hearty genuine laugh had reassured him. During the morning he had misgivings that the child's visit to London might possibly prove a failure; now he felt somehow as if it might even be a success.

He did not disturb the chess-players in the back drawing-room until he was forced to take leave to be in time for his train. Then he called to Lilith, "I am going;" and she flew to him, looking

radiant and bright in spite of her mourning garb, and accompanied him to the hall door.

"And what am I to say to mother?" he asked, after he had kissed her forehead and blessed her, and was standing on the door-step in the moonlight. "What are your messages?"

"That Mrs. Macdonald is a very nice kind person," she began; then, coming near, she added, whispering, "but she gives in to Mrs. Law too much. And, as for the poor dear Glassman, it is shocking! I have made up my mind to read up India hard, and talk to him of nothing else;" then she stopped, hesitating.

"Well, make haste, dear; I am late. What else?"

"That I like the house and my bed-room and Willie—oh, I like Willie immensely! He is really the first boy I have talked to properly."

"Boy!" the Rector laughed uneasily. "My dear child, William Macdonald is a young man of perhaps six- or seven-and-twenty."

"Well, he behaves just like a boy; so it doesn't matter what his age is. He has promised to do a lot of things for me."

"Good-night, and Heaven bless you!" said the Rector, going off gravely.

"I wonder what Lilian will think of the child's messages?" mused Mr. Rawson, between his dozings during the night-journey to Heathside. "Judith and Lilith are utterly antagonistic—of that there is not the shadow of a doubt. She likes Mrs. Macdonald, also the poor old gentleman, and she is capable of siding with them against Judith. Then she likes the house, her bed-room, and Willie. I hardly liked that putting Willie last. I have noticed that people generally put something they like best at the end of the catalogue. In talking you never get them to unbosom themselves till quite the end of the time. The worst is, this transplantation to London is my doing," he concluded uncomfortably. "Well, if it does not turn out well, I shall have the consolation that I acted for the best—a poor consolation, but still a consolation."

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CHAPTER VII.

LILITH felt sorry when she saw her godfather walking away quickly in the moonlight. She shut the heavy door with some difficulty, and turned to see Willie Macdonald running down-stairs.

"You should have let me do that for you, little one," he said, with the elder-brother kindliness that some young grown-up people show to juniors.

He stood under the red-and-yellow stained-glass lamp which swung gently from the hall ceiling. He was tall, rather broad, and very fair, Scotch looking, after the Macdonalds, with the fine firm facial outline of the Rawsons. It was a manly face, with boyish fun in the bright blue eyes and playing about a somewhat effeminate mouth.

He was in evening-dress. Mrs. Law never relaxed what she termed "decent and orderly habits." All at No. 6, Prince's Square, retired to their rooms an hour before dinner, which hour they were supposed at all events to spend partly in attiring themselves for the im-

portant meal of the day. A little bell began tinkling—a feeble but a persistent little bell.

"Prayers!" said Willie to Lilith. "It is one of my uncle's little pleasures to ring the bell."

The two went slowly upstairs when suddenly Willie remembered his Shelley. He stopped short at the window seat. Lilith noticed him flush up, and then anxiously peer into corners and hurriedly shake the blue cushions.

She nudged him, and whispered that his mother had found his book and put it into her pocket.

"Oh!" said Willie, amused that such a new-comer should have "seen through" the family affairs.

He had partly liked Lilith at first sight because she reminded him, with her slouching gait and sharp eyes, of an old pet of his. This had been a crane, given him by his uncle—a queer old bird, who was never presentable, because he was continually moulting, the process being so interminable that, when one wing was in perfect order, the other looked as if some one had plucked him alive.

Now Willie liked Lilith because she was "sharp," unlike those "bread-and-butter misses," as he called girls in their teens, much to the gratification of his mother and aunt, the latter of whom was wont to state, when he was not present, that, when the time came for William to marry, she would choose him a wife.

"My aunt does not like poetry," he explained to Lilith, as they went slowly upstairs.

"Not wild poetry," said Lilith, smiling—she scarcely knew why. "You cannot say she dislikes poetry when she delights in Sir Walter Scot's ballads, and believes in the 'Psalm of Life,' and sees all the hidden beauties in that long-drawn-out epitaph 'In Memoriam.'"

"'In Memoriam!'" said Willie, amused. "Wait a minute; I had a lot to say to you—'Memoriam' reminds me—but here are the servants trooping up, I say," he said, forgetting Lilith was not a boy—she really seemed like a boy—"look here! Take care you don't laugh when uncle says 'Amen' in the middle of the prayers. Poor soul, he is really devout; but he sows his 'Amens' broadcast. Then there is another thing," he added earnestly. "Aunt sets up for a judge of drawing and painting and art; but somehow I don't think she is. So I should like to be there when you show what drawings you have to show; and you must back me up. Do you understand? She always wants me out of the way, because I don't knock under to her. Do you see?"

Lilith nodded; and then the two passed sedately into the big rooms where James the butler had been arranging chairs in a circle around a table where there were a lamp and a big Prayer-book with clasps. Before this sat Mrs. Law, sternly devout, scrutinizing each one of the little congregation as he or she came in demurely. Mr. Law sat, wan, tired, and meek, by his wife's side. Mrs. Law, who fancied she had once seen the old gentleman glance at an unusually comely housemaid at prayers, had since habitually confiscated his spectacles beforehand, so that during family prayer he might be said to be partially deprived of sight as well as of hearing.

The servants, some of them maidens with gentle pretty faces, such as are frequently to be found in the service of somewhat stern mis-

tresses, took their seats quietly. Mrs. Macdonald, Willie, and Lilith sat aside, apart from the household who lived below-stairs, as is customary in well-regulated families. Mrs. Law read a portion of Scripture in a warning sonorous voice. Then they all turned and knelt, and Lilith listened for the old gentleman's voice. She had expected to be tempted to laughter, instead of which she was tempted to sadness. Sometimes Lilith had suffered actual mental pain when a poor sheep, whose lambs had been taken to market and were to her knowledge at that very hour at the butcher's, had come near her and "baa'd" with a woeful "baa," looking with almost human wistfulness into her face. Something in old Mr. Law's scattered "Amens" touched her to the quick—touched her almost to resentment, as the woes of an animal. There was a patience, a wistfulness, a submission in the quavering old voice. So, later on—when, prayers valiantly concluded by Mrs. Law, she determinedly seized her husband and removed him upstairs with a jailer or keeper-like manner, shortening his "good-nights" and refusing him his spectacles any more that night—Lilith felt the beginning of a love for the "little Glassman," as she had mentally nicknamed him, and promised herself to make his life somewhat brighter, if she could.

Mrs. Macdonald accompanied her to her room, and assured her that Watch was most comfortably housed in an old kennel prepared for him in a scullery next to the butler's bedroom. Then she timidly kissed Lilith—Mrs. Macdonald, never self-assertive, had grown diffident under her sister's rule—and showed her the big wardrobe where the contents of her trunks were neatly arranged.

"Priscilla did it," she said—"one of those fair pleasant-looking maids; perhaps you noticed them at prayers Priscilla is prepared to wait upon you. You will only have to ring that bell by your bed, and she will come day or night; the bell rings in her room."

Lilith was about to expostulate—she had some theory about not being waited upon—but Mrs. Macdonald had disappeared.

She sat down on the edge of her four-post bedstead and looked around her. It was a large back-room, with good but faded carpets and hangings; the furniture was well-polished dark mahogany; the lighted candles on the dressing-table were reflected here, there, everywhere, as the flames flickered in the night-wind. The window was open, and the blind swayed in the rising breeze, rapping restlessly against the half-closed shutters. There was a night-light meekly burning behind the huge ewers and basins in the dark wooden washhand-stand; Lilith's dressing-gown lay limply over a prim chair.

"It looks just as if it were frightened,"' thought the girl; and then she looked round again.

She felt as if there were something ghost-like about this staid bedchamber in Prince's Square. The house had belonged to the Laws since it was built. This had been a guest-chamber; but in two centuries how many tragic scenes might not have been enacted here! What stormy quarrels, what desperate grief, what remorse, what reconciliation. She stopped short.

"To be fanciful to-night is not the best preparation for being prac-

tical to-morrow," she assured herself; so she called herself to order and began to undress.

To-morrow she must first undergo the ordeal of showing her paintings to strangers. Then Mrs. Law had informed her that she would herself take her to see an artist—not one of Lilith's visionary R.A.'s, but a respectable luminary who happened to be a friend of Mr. Law's; he would very kindly give her his advice; and, when this advice had been heard, Mrs. Law would take Lilith to the new School of Ornamental Art, which was permitted by Government to have a branch house for females. Lilith had intensely disliked the word "female" as thus applied; but she had determined not to be whimsical, and to accept all help gratefully that would further her object of study; so she had acquiesced thankfully, and she fell asleep prepared for the morrow's programme, but scarcely for such mockery of sleep, for such a maze in her dream-world.

Asleep, she either merely lost consciousness partly or dreamed that she was lying there, for she saw each item in the room. Then she heard the door tried and pushed open, and in walked a lady, a very handsome woman, with a large hoop which swayed, followed a maid in a quaint dress, with a tall mob-cap, carrying a magnificent Court-costume with brocade. This the maid laid carefully on the sofa, paying particular attention to the gauzy puffings of the train. Meanwhile the lady, after removing her large hat and feathers and short cloak, bent forward toward the mirror on the dressing table to look at a little semicircular patch on her chin; and Lilith saw in the reflection the portrait of Dame Cecilia in the big drawing-room. She started up with a cry—to find that it was a dream. The room was quiet in the dim light of the night-lamp on the wash-stand. She struck a match and looked at her watch. It was midnight; she could scarcely have slept an hour.

She felt wide awake; it was an hour or more before she slept. Then, after a while, she dreamed again, and this time she knew she was dreaming. It was the village church at home. She saw the ivy glistening, as if wet from recent rain. Storm-clouds were driving across the sky. There was a dull hazy gray light upon the fence—upon the old tombstones. Two people, a girl, and a young man, were walking along the narrow path. She heard their voices, heard the man say, "Lilith!" Then the girl looked back, and Lilith, horrified, recognized—herself! She strained—as people do in dreams—to see who this man was who called her "Lilith," and in the effort, and after the shock of seeing her "double," she awoke.

The scare of the dream was still upon her. It was a warm July morning; the early sunshine streamed in. She rushed to the window and opened it. There were the staid black back-gardens lying straightly side by side. The back-windows of the King's Square houses opposite were like closed lids, shuttered or veiled by white blinds.

There were only a few cats creeping stealthily along the top of the garden-walls, or leaping down to reach their particular homes, out of which they had wandered over night. With a sigh Lilith leaned against the shutter. As she drew deep breaths of the morning air which came over the houses from Hampstead, the dream fled away

as fast as a straw cast into a swiftly-rushing current. In a few seconds she knew it was but a fantastic trick of memory in sleep.

"But it is too bad to have oneself and other people shaken up together in dreams like lots that you draw out of a hat!" she thought, while the church-clock close by rang out five strokes. Then followed the Westminster chimes. Some noisy sparrows, impish-looking birds in their plump blackness, flew out from under the roof above, and chased each other wildly. A cat sitting on a parapet, half dozing, with her tail comfortably curled round her, opened her eyes and pricked up her ears, then dozed again, recognizing the impossibility of capturing such excitable creatures.

"I shall get up—and paint," decided Lilith.

The next room to her bed-chamber, formerly a work-room, had been arranged for her as "a room to draw in," as Mrs. Law insisted upon calling it. "It was ridiculous to give a beginner a studio," she said. She was determined not to encourage "folly."

It was a comfortable little room, with one large window. Here and there were box-ottomans that had stored the needlework which had proceeded here for so many years; Lilith's packages, her pictures, canvases, paint-boxes, *et-cætera*, were piled on an old mahogany dinner-wagon. The room was arranged for use, not for ornament, as such an apartment in Mrs. Law's house naturally would be.

Lilith's easel leaned limply in a corner. It seemed like a dear familiar old friend helplessly bound in these strange quarters.

"Neither you nor I would have chosen this for a home, I expect," said Lilith, mentally apostrophizing the easel—her inanimate companion through so many hours of happy or difficult work that she had unconsciously begun to feel for it as for some living thing. "But, now we are here, we must make the best of it."

She unbound the easel, set it up, got her canvas and her paints, and arranged the shutters.

She was restlessly anxious to paint one or other of these two vivid dreams. She could recall the picturesque dress of Dame Cecilia, the tint of her quilted satin petticoat, the curious little cloak tied around her shoulders, the careless grace of her gesture as she threw down her big hat and feathers. Busily she squeezed the little dabs of paint on the palette, settled the canvas, and drew the figure of Dame Cecilia bending forward to glance at that patch on her pretty chin in the mirror over the dressing-table.

The figure was drawn. The outlines of the table and mirror were complete. Then Lilith stopped short; she had forgotten the face, the colors—all. She passed her hand across her eyes; this must be a trick of her ordinarily good memory.

"Mother used to say she could not understand how I could remember scenes, tints, everything," she said to herself.

Then she walked a few steps and shut her eyes. The dream was gone. Her memory was a blank.

Puzzled, she put aside her canvas, and took up another, mixed a few colors thoughtfully, and began to paint the churchyard. She would paint those figures as she saw them walking together along the path.

The result was the same—failure. She could recollect the common wooden planks—"Sacred to the Memory of John Smith" or

"Here lie the Earthly Remains of Mary Brown"—but the figures seen in her dream—those she could not recall.

So she set to work and painted her mother's portrait. She was so absorbed in her task that the quarters chimed and the dressing-bell rang and she did not hear.

The breakfast-bell had just begun clanging, when the door opened and Watch bounded in and almost threw his mistress down. Willie Macdonald, who had been taking him for a walk, and came to hasten Lilith, added—

"Luckily Aunt Judith is not down yet."

"Why luckily?" asked Lilith. "She would scarcely scold me. I am not her husband, or her sister, or—her nephew."

Willie had nearly said "But you are her guest," when he stopped short. He hardly knew this swarthy, curious-looking girl's temper yet, and was still cautious.

"No," he began; "but—you see—they put you under Aunt Judith's protection, as it were; and there is no denying the fact that she is—to put it mildly—strict."

Then, holding Watch, who was panting, with his tongue out, he stepped behind Lilith and suddenly said—

"Oh!"

He had formed no ideas about this girl's painting. The fact of a young-girl visitor had been too unimportant for him to care much what she did, or how she did it. Before Lilith came, if he had given her a passing thought, he set her painting down as in the style of Aunt Judith's, whose elaborate representations of natural flowers he liked less than those on wall-paper, because Mrs. Law's productions affected to be like nature, and were accordingly an insult to his judgment, and those on the wall-papers did not pretend to be natural.

This beautiful face, alive with meaning and expression, which seemed to look straight at him from the canvas, took away his breath. When he cried "Oh!" he could not have explained this surprise, this slight shock. He was unprepared.

"Why 'Oh'?" said Lilith, with a suspicious look, turning round.

"Only—that—well, it looks like a man's work—that is all! Where is the picture you copied it from?"

"Far away," said Lilith dryly. "What a judge this young man must be!" she thought disdainfully. The word "copy" was detestable to her. She had copied only from nature's originals.

"You have a good memory then," said Willie awkwardly, his respect growing as he watched Lilith touch the face here and there, bringing out wonderful effects, as if her brush were a wand and she a witch. "That face reminds me of one—ah, I know now! It is in Fontainebleau—a St. Catharine—that lovely youthful martyr-look, as if she were ready to face all the horrors, yet was ignorant of all."

Lilith laughed. Willie blushed.

"Of course I know nothing," he said; "I am only a blunderer. But what have I said that makes you laugh?"

"Only what you said about youth. That is—my mother!"

"When she was young, of course?" Willie wished his remarks anywhere. He had some vague recollection of Mrs. Drew's story, her desertion by her husband, his death, *et cætera*. But he had not felt sufficient curiosity to learn the truths of a painful story which

had been only darkly hinted at in his aunt's evening conversation with his mother, when he was generally half-asleep in the drawing-room dimness.

"No," said Lilith; "I could hardly be expected to remember my mother—well, as young as I am—could I? I am fifteen. Mother was not much more than eighteen when she married. She is somewhere in the thirties; but, oh—"

She turned toward him and launched into hot romantic talk about this beautiful injured creature whom she called "mother." Willie listened, absently patting Watch—his elbow on his knee, his cheek on his hand, till a robust peal of the loud hand-bell told that go down they must.

"And I am afraid—you won't mind my saying so? I can see Watch's paws all over your dress; and there is such a curiously-shaped paint-smudge on your cheek," said Willie awkwardly.

Lilith laid down her brush and flew gleefully into her bed-room, followed by Watch, who, taking his captor by surprise, escaped.

Willie went thoughtfully down-stairs. He felt that he had seen something new and unexpected, which had made a startling impression upon him.

"That girl is not at all like other people," he said to himself.

Mrs. Law was pouring out tea at the head of the long dining table. She had been delayed in her toilette by her husband's fidgetiness—she looked grim. Willie took his usual seat, glancing round at the dusky wainscoted walls, which were hung with family portraits. Some of these were of beautiful women with long taper fingers and bright eyes that seemed to follow one about. He had scarcely thought of these ancestral beauties before; now he looked at them with a new interest, to compare them with Lilith's painting.

"Not one looks so alive," he thought, as he cut bread for his mother—whose morning office it was to prepare old Mr. Law's breakfast-tray before James carried it upstairs—"and not one of those faces can compare with St. Catharine."

Then he glanced up; Mrs. Law said sharply, "What's that?" as she sometimes did when a suspicious clatter of crockery was heard in the distant kitchen; and James stood on the alert at his mistress's elbow, respectfully hiding an irrepressible smile with his hand.

No such noise had been heard in that house since Willie was a lad—James knew that right well. This gawky young lady seemed as if she was going to turn the house topsy-turvy in no time, the old man thought.

Lilith was springing down-stairs, singing a Spanish serenade in a resonant contralto, Watch leaping and barking at her side. She rushed into the dining-room as she did at home when she was late, and almost knocked over a carved Indian screen which was kept near the door to intercept any wandering draught of air.

"My dear, whatever is the matter?" asked Mrs. Law, shocked.

Lilith, taking a seat hastily placed ready for her by the nervous Mrs. Macdonald, explained that she thought she was late; then, seeing James take up the tray prepared for Mr. Law, she had a sudden idea.

"Oh, if that is for Mr. Law, do let me take it up!" she said. "I

know all about breakfasts in bed and grandfather says I manage his beautifully—nothing ever gets spilled."

"My dear, I thank you; James will take it up as usual. That will do, James."

Mrs. Law's manner was freezing. Mrs. Macdonald, whose fair face was pink with embarrassment, dashed into spasmodic talk with all the three. Willie had taken Watch for a walk. Had he been good? Had Lilith slept well?

"Overslept, I should think," said Mrs. Law dryly. "At least they talk of an over-accumulation of nervous force when people begin the day too cheerfully. They also talk of morning excitement leading to evening sorrow."

"You have a capital voice," remarked Willie kindly to Lilith.

"In its place, at the right time," said Mrs. Law—"like everything else. You must understand also, my dear, that Watch can be allowed above-stairs only on occasion." Then she laid down her rules; then came prayers; then began the day of ordeal.

When Lilith went upstairs to bed that night, she felt that she had lost something she could never find again in this world; but what was it? Puzzling, heavy-hearted, she sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Drew was watering her special plants in the shady conservatory when Lilith's first letter arrived. She sat down on a bench under a great tropical creeper to read it. There were several thin sheets; the first spoke cautiously of the house in Prince's Square and its occupants.

"They were all kind," Lilith wrote, "and Willie, Mrs. Macdonald's son, is just like a boy of my own age; he is very kind, but a little awkward, like my big boys in the Sunday-school."

Then came the gist of the letter—

"Mother—oh, mother, if I could have known!" it began. "Have I been in a long dream, and is this the waking, or what is it? None of them think anything of my paintings—I even believe they think them actually bad; they don't give me much hope of ever doing anything. Can all this time have been wasted? Why did Heaven give me ideas if they were of no use? It is such a cruel puzzle! I am too anxious and worried to think or reason clearly. I will tell you everything—you shall judge, you shall tell me what to do. Well, yesterday morning early Mrs. Law came upstairs to see my paintings; Willie Macdonald came and helped me to put them in the right light, and spoke now and then just as if I had been a painter, instead of a poor yearning student. Well, Mrs. Law looked at them all carefully through her spectacles, turned them this way and that, asked questions, then said, 'Hum, hum!' or 'That will do,' or "You have been allowed to go on in advance of your powers, so it is difficult to judge.'

"I would not be discouraged; I started bravely for our visits, with the poor sketches. First, we drove a long way to see Mr. R. It is a quaint old house, with great dark silent rooms, old paintings brooding on the walls, or dignified statues in corners that seemed to

turn from us into the shadows; only the studio was light, gay, and full of strange things—glass, carpets, hangings, birds brought from the very ends of the world. Mr. R. was a kind old man, with gray hair and beard; but he talked to me as if I were a child at play, mimicking art. He looked at my sketches, said, 'Not at all bad!' —as if it were astonishing that they were not; then, when I had no more to show, said, half in jest, half earnestly, 'Well, you ladies are all of you alike on one point—you expect to begin where we old men, who have been hard at it all our lives, leave off!'

"Here Mrs. Law disclaimed this on her own account; she said she had worked up line by line, point by point, and even now dared only attempt a flower, or a bird's-nest, or a bit of still life, *et cætera*. She had spent months at plain straight lines. Mr. R. nodded his head, and said, 'Now if our young friend will follow your example, she may do well.' After this he shook hands with us, evidently glad that he might now begin his work in peace; and we drove off back into town to the Female Branch of the School for Ornamental Art, a big black house in a long black street.

"The door was opened by a porter. We entered a great bare hall and were taken into the 'office'—a large room with an ugly floor-cloth instead of a carpet, tables with books of statistics, directories, *et cætera*, a few unframed chalk-drawings of pieces of column or architrave pinned upon boards on the wall and printed and written notices fastened to other green-baize-covered boards, great unvarnished deal cupboards here and there, a copying-press, hideous chairs. The only object with any beauty was the lady who sat at the table in the center of the room. She was middle-aged, fair-faced, blue-eyed, and wore a pretty gray bonnet with shining gray satin strings.

"She was pleasant in her conventional way; she said 'Hem,' or 'Yes,' or 'Quite so,' as Mrs. Law talked, and explained who she was and who I was, and that Mr. R. had given me 'reasonable encouragement.' Then the sketches were had out.

"She just smiled, and glanced at one or two; when she came to your favorite sunset, she said, 'I see our young friend is ambitious!' and shut the portfolio. I felt ashamed, till my courage overcame my shame. 'We see so many of these effects,' she explained to Mrs. Law, 'so much promise afterward unfulfilled, that we prefer to give our own tests of ability; then, lecturing very cleverly upon the necessity of hard work, strict work, of passing through the Female School with the same patient and determined spirit with which the Spartan maidens went through their gymnastic training, 'Our school is literally a gymnasium of art,' she said, 'and, while the strong grow stronger as they go on, the weak ones soon learn their weakness.'

"After this, she gave me the exmination-tests—a big 'O' and a big 'A' to be copied without any measurement—and a little book of geometry. Certain that I could have 'passed' there and then, I fixed to-morrow for the examination. She raised her eyebrows and repressed a smile. 'You are hasty, my dear,' she said; 'but I like students to choose their own time.' Then she opened the room door for us, and in a minute we were driving back to the square, Mrs. Law praising this head-mistress, Miss Levell, and congratulating me on my chances of admission. Chances of admission! When I had only to draw an 'O' and an 'A,' and knew six times as much

as the little geometry-book contained! Directly after luncheon I flew upstairs, and got my paper on my drawing-board, and cut my chalks, Watch sitting grave in the corner, with his head on his paws and his eyes sleepily fixed on me." (Watch seems quiet, and his tail lollops more than usual, and he does nothing but sniff suspiciously about, then snort, as if he had a cold in his head.)

"Well, you would have thought my task an easy one enough! I began. The first 'A' was a nice-looking one; but it was not like the copy. I found I must copy a little bit by little bit. The result was a shaky letter I should have been ashamed to own. Even this was not absolutely correct. I tried the 'O's.' These were worse. They were egg-shaped, or bulged in the middle when I drew boldly; and when I copied they looked so wretched, so wavering, that I began to feel as if I were bewitched. No wonder Miss Levell smiled at my haste! There were dozens of spoiled sheets, and not one that I could show!

"Here five o'clock struck, and Priscilla brought me tea; she stopped outside and told some one I was not to be disturbed. However, Willie Macdonald—for it was he—said 'Nonsense!' and came in. Then he sat in a corner and laughed at me. He said I must forgive him; but, sitting there crouched up on my high stool, I looked so like an unhappy bird—especially like a crane he used to keep. I think his manner did me good. I showed him my failures, 'The worst is,' I said, 'I have no more paper; and I cannot bear to ask your aunt to send for any—for she saw all this that I brought, and will know why it is gone.' 'Oh, that is easily arranged!' he said; and he went off, and, before a minute or two were over—as it seemed to me—was back again, out of breath, with a great roll of cartridge-paper. He was determined, he said, to see my 'O' and my 'A' finished before dinner. It was only my nervousness which prevented me from doing myself justice in so simple a thing. He would sit by and tell me when I was going wrong. He did more than this. The boy gave me a valuable lesson in eye-measurement. I began to see relative distances in this horrid technical work. He talked and urged me on. When the dressing-bell rang, I had an 'A' and an 'O' ready which bore the test of close measurement by the original with the compasses.

"He had no sooner finished measuring than he burst into talk. I must tell you what he said that you may be able to judge of my doings. He said that this test was well given to one whose future work was to be in architecture or design, but that it was unfair where absolute accuracy was unnecessary. 'Who would want you to copy?' he said. 'You are wanted to originate. They are going to bind you, and make you hop after them with your wings bound; however, I have little doubt but that you will break your bonds and fly, if necessary.' Is not Willie a kind fellow?"

Then the letter ended with the usual affectionate messages. Mrs. Drew felt all her child's anxieties and emotions second-hand. She read the letter twice. Then she went on watering her flowers. She knew Lilith's godfather would call that afternoon.

She was lounging in the drawing-room with Madam Ware during the heat of the day when Mr. Rawson came in, flushed after his hot

ride. After he had sat a while, Mrs. Drew handed him Lilith's letter.

"It is all right," he assured her. "There is only one point"—hesitating.

Mrs. Drew managed to take him into the conservatory. There he explained himself. William Macdonald was a young man; Lilith was, if a child, developed for her fifteen years. Was such an intimacy desirable? What did Mrs. Drew think?

Mrs. Drew laughed The idea was absolutely amusing.

"Dear Lilith will be safe from any notions of that sort for many years to come," she said confidently. "Poor darling, she is so unbeautiful, so singularly devoid of fresh youthful prettiness!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Rawson. It was an "Ah!" that might mean almost anything.

"My only anxiety is that she will be discouraged," said Mrs. Drew.

The Rector spoke warmly in praise of Lilith's courage.

"If she is not very feminine in appearance, she is masculine in mind," he added. Then he took leave, advising Mrs. Drew to urge Lilith to persevere, and to go through the unwelcome drudgery of the Female School of Ornamental Art.

As he rode home, he thought deeply about Lilith. He did not wish her strong, passionate, yet lofty nature to be chained by an early ordinary love-affair. He did not quite understand Lilith. He sometimes imagined that she was one of those exceptional creatures that occasionally appeared in the world like comets. In such a case, early marriage would be fatal to her happiness.

"So we must beware of beginnings," thought the Rector, who felt the responsibility of godparency to a fatherless girl, and who firmly believed that one great principle in life was to nip undesirable buds. "One consolation is, we can always have her home!"

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Drew wrote to her daughter cheerily, playfully, with an underlying seriousness; she followed the Rector's advice.

"Begin at this strict drawing-school," she wrote. "If you find you are doing no good there, you can always make a change and study elsewhere."

Lilith felt brighter after her mother's letter. She passed her geometrical examinations easily, and Miss Levell nodded quite condescendingly when she showed her "O" and her "A." Next morning she began her student-life at the school.

When she shut the hall door at Prince's Square at starting, there were Willie Macdonald and Watch waiting for her outside. Willie quietly informed her that he intended to escort her to and fro daily.

"My hours at the Deed-Office are ten till four," he said; "yours are nine till five at the school; I can manage it well. It was quite a relief to Aunt Judith; she was groaning about Priscilla's wasted hours."

Those walks in the fresh morning were delightful to Lilith; the air in the squares seemed cold and pure, almost country-like. Willie

was buoyant; he had a bright brain, and his talk was, if chiefly "common-sensical," clever and reasonable; it put Lilith into a suitable humor for her drudgery. This was extremely trying to the ambitious idealistic girl; she who had had her freedom absolutely was mentally a prisoner.

This was the routine she went through daily: The old porter who opened the school door checked the minute of her arrival by the clock in the hall, and witnessed her signature of the same in a huge book. Then she passed through into the elementary students' cloak-room. Bereft of cloak and bonnet, she went up the great stone staircases to the attics. There were some beautiful frescoes midway on a landing wall which she always looked at yearningly before committing herself to the bald ugliness of her day's work. These were processions of ancient times reproduced in the vivid coloring of to-day—Bacchic processions, with the young Dionysos astride his goat, surrounded by beautiful women, nymphs, joyous boys, sly fauns, and wise satyrs. Why the Bacchanalian orgies should be the one "thing of beauty" for the female students to enjoy Lilith did not ask herself. She only knew that, as she passed these frescoes on her weary way to her weary work, she wondered bitterly why she was not born when these joyous scenes were actual—part of each human being's life.

It was such a dreary place—those attics all thrown into one low-ceiled room, where she worked. The chamber for the "elementaries" was simple to wickedness—"One chamber of Hades," was Lilith's wild feeling when Miss Levell escorted her to her future study-place for perhaps months to come—walls and ceilings whitewashed; long plain wooden and iron desks and high chairs, the whole furniture; nothing on the walls, and bare floors; high wire blinds to the windows. Lilith felt, with her pang of dislike to this hiddeous place, that she could well imagine that to be shut up here would be the fitting but most terrible punishment of one who had deeply sinned through love of the Beautiful.

How could the Beautiful be studied here? While she was wondering, Miss Levell was arranging Lilith's work at the portion of the long desk assigned to her. There was a glazed card with some traced lines hung against the rail above the desk, and on the desk was Lilith's drawing-board, with a fresh white sheet of drawing-paper pinned upon it. This sheet had been pinned on by kind Miss Levell's own fair hands, while Lilith was glancing around at the many quiet, ugly, uncouth figures working away at the desks in silence which to Lilith seemed the hopeless silence of despair. Miss Levell was always kind to beginners who had to encounter their Slough of Despond.

"What is that? What am I to do?" asked Lilith.

Miss Levell knew the question well. She showed Lilith how, without measurement, she was to draw certain lines at certain distances from each other. Then she went on to the many other elementary students, teaching and advising in a low voice which was in itself potently depressing. Presently she flitted past Lilith like a shadow and went out. Lilith set herself to her straight lines. By luncheon-time she had succeeded in drawing a few inches. At the end of the day the inches were rubbed out. Lilith went from the

school fiercely. Willie Macdonald, who determinedly insisted upon her telling her first experience to him during their walk home, had hard work to pacify her. She grew more contented and less wretched when he gave her a humorous account of his first days at the Deed-Office; when he had made her laugh, he took her home.

The next day Lilith's hand was more obedient; Miss Levell encouraged her. The day after, just before the luncheon-hour, Miss Levell came in. Lilith had finished her curiously intantine task boldly; there were some fine bold lines upon the paper. Lilith's heart beat faster as Miss Levell came up; she expected that these would be her first and last "lines"—she would be promoted to "curves." She was smiling to herself at the absurdity of the work, when there was a deep sigh.

"My dear,' whispered Miss Levell, "that will never do—quite incorrect. See here—and here"—pointing to the shiny card and to Lilith's drawing alternately—"you have not ascertained your distance rightly; you must take a fresh sheet and begin again."

While Miss Levell lectured and taught, Lilith meekly unpinned the failure and pinned another sheet upon her board. Then the luncheon bell rang, and Miss Levell went away. The girls disappeared—some to return to their homes in the neighborhood, others to eat their luncheons, seasoned with the chatter which was forbidden in the studios, in the dressing-rooms.

Lilith was alone and furious. First she paced the empty room in a rage, and then an idea came to her. She took up her drawing—those rejected penciled lines—and, seeing how good they were, if not exactly like the copy, she resolved—

"I will give them some straight lines; and then good-by—come what may, good-by!"

She sat down, scrawled "The Palace of Straight Lines" at the top of her paper, and then made a bold sketch of the school, the exterior on one side of the paper, the interior on the other.

They were fine sketches with her own firm artist-touch. The one bit of spite was a portrait—all in lines—of Miss Levell, who was looking out of window, pointing rigidly to the inscription above.

By the time she had finished this and had signed her name in full her head was hot with passion; she went quietly to the cloak-room, dressed, and strode back to Prince's Square.

She rushed down the area steps; Priscilla, who opened the door, stood aghast.

"I have a bad headache," she said; then she asked for a letter to be taken to the Deed-Office to Mr. Willie, that he might not be troubled to call at the school for nothing.

Pretty Priscilla was all sympathy. Mrs. Law's rule had made her maid-servants very gentle and obliging. Priscilla not only promised to keep Miss Drew's early return a secret from the ladies, but undertook to take the letter to Mr. Willie herself.

"But, before I go, you must let me see you lying down, miss, with a cup of tea and a bit of toast," was her stipulation.

While Priscilla made the tea and prepared the toast, Lilith crept upstairs and wrote the note to Willie herself.

"DEAR WILLIE,—I have done with the school, and the school

with me; I will tell you when you come home to-day. I promise to do what you tell me, if only you will make haste.

"LILITH."

The note reached Willie half an hour before he could leave the office. The half-hour seemed long; then he jumped into a hansom. As the cab sped along, he wondered vaguely why he was so anxious about Lilith, so deeply interested in her.

"I feel as if she were my sister," he thought. "I can see all her defects, and I don't admire her personally one bit; but, if she is in trouble, I am up in arms. I feel as if I care for nothing till her affairs are set right."

Lilith had been crying passionately; but she met Willie with perfect self-control. She sat on her chair in the painting-room and told him everything, while he sat on an ottoman, playing with Watch and occasionally stroking his fair mustache to conceal a smile, for he had still enough of the schoolboy element in his composition to enjoy a mutiny, and Lilith's behavior to-day was certainly mutinous.

"Your mother must be told," he said, glancing toward the "St. Catharine"—as he called the sketch—in the corner; but he persuaded Lilith not to write herself. "I will tell my mother all about it," he said; "our mothers will understand each other. You see it will be painful to Mrs. Drew to hear that you and the school are at loggerheads already."

Mrs. Macdonald wrote. Her answer was the appearance of Lilith's mother upon the scene. She came to the Prince's Square house as unobtrusively as any casual morning visitor. She had lunched with Mr. and Mrs. Law and Mrs. Macdonald, had talked over India with the old gentleman in the drawing-room afterward, and had been introduced to Willie before she had time to hear Lilith's story. Then they sat side by side on the big sofa in Lilith's bed-chamber, the rough dark head against the smooth fair one, and Lilith told her woes.

Then Mrs. Drew put on her bonnet and drove off to the drawing-school.

Miss Levell was astonished to find that this sweet-faced gentle lady was Lilith's mother.

"We think your daughter so extremely wild," said Miss Levell. "Of course she has imagination and facility of execution; but of what use are these without rigid training?"

"Certainly very little," Mrs. Drew said.

Then the two ladies talked over the matter, and Lilith was forgiven, and reinstated for as long as she conformed to rules.

The drawing-room tea was over when Mrs. Drew returned; but, as she went up the dimly lighted staircase, Lilith flew down and said that Willie had made her some tea in the painting-room in his own particular "Etna."

The room looked cheery and bright. Mrs. Drew, as Lilith removed her bonnet and cloak, thought to herself how good it was that the child had some companionship. She had felt that Willie Macdonald was younger than his years when he blushed so furiously while he was introduced to her.

"Willie happened to have a holiday," Lilith informed her as she

unbuttoned her cloak; "and—oh, mother, what do you think? He has been and has got us a box for 'Romeo and Juliet' to night."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Mrs. Drew looked regretfully at Willie. It was good of the young man to trouble about them; but the idea of herself and Lilith in a theater when their life-trouble had come straight from the stage—it was impossible! "We cannot go, Mr. Macdonald," she said; "but any one will be glad of the opportunity."

Lilith looked so disappointed that Willie forgot a sort of shy awkwardness he felt with Mrs. Drew, and, while he poured out her tea and Lilith sat crouching by her, holding her tea-cup, he was quite eloquently persuasive. Mrs. Drew, always dreading to be selfish—indeed, she nursed a secret notion that she was one of the most selfish creatures alive—began to waver. She had been to town to see her husband's children. She had made sacrifices, that neither they nor their mother should want. If she had done this, she thought, was it not foolish to dread seeing a stage-play, a theater, again?

"You are beginning to persuade me," she said, caressing Lilith's shaggy head. "I feel this child feverish with her longing to go. Thank you, Mr. Macdonald! If I can make my dull gown smart enough for going to the play, I will go."

Both Lilith and Willie looked at each other. Willie rushed off; Lilith executed a triumphant dance about the "room to draw in," as Mrs. Law called it, nearly upsetting Willie's patent American lamp—that wonderful lamp which had once cooked a chop which it was possible to eat without paring the outside and surreptitiously throwing internal flabby morsels to the cats in the back-gardens.

In a moment Willie returned with a white shiny box. He removed the lid, and there was a perfect bouquet of choice white roses. As he offered it gravely to Mrs. Drew, a festoon of white ribbon fell down her mourning skirts. Then, while she said "How lovely!" and buried her delicate little nose among the blooms, he carefully extracted from the box a long spray that would fasten from throat to waist.

Mrs. Drew objected. Lilith, gathered up on the sofa-end, looked weirdly delighted.

"Mother, you look like 'The Mourning Bride,'" she said, in her quick, curious way. "I don't know who she was, but you brought her to my mind; and, if you will stay to-morrow, I will paint you. I promise you it will be a picture that will make old R—— say I was quite right to begin where he left off, and will make that old Leveler cut me off those straight lines or give me up altogether."

"Lilith wants encouragement," interposed Willie firmly. "It will be quite as well for you to stay."

The boy spoke as if Mrs. Drew were a little school-girl, instead of his senior by ten years! She gave him a curious look, then capitulated.

Priscilla, who was in the scheme of the play-going, took great pains with Mrs. Drew. She was nearly an hour in dressing her. She managed to loosen the wavy masses of fair hair and tie them into a bunch of curls. One of Lilith's Indian muslin *fichus* was gracefully looped about as much of the velvety neck—which Mrs. Drew had rigidly concealed during all these long years of single yet

wedded life—as the girl could manage to show without the lady's discovering how far her bodice was pinned back. Then came Willie's rose-spray. While this was being arranged, Mrs. Drew said—

"But I look as if I were out of mourning!"

It was a delicate way of saying that her youthful beauty startled her.

At this juncture Priscilla produced a shawl of neutral tint, lent by Mrs. Macdonald; then all was hurry. At the dinner-table Mrs. Law's attention was completely absorbed by one or two failures made by the cook. So she merely felt vaguely that Mrs. Drew was very smartly dressed for a widow, and that there was a festive excitement in the air.

A little later the carriage was announced. Willie briefly explained, and the three drove off to the theater before the old people recognized what was going forward.

This driving through the brightly-lit streets, dreamily listening to the chatter and laughter of the two cheerful young voices, while the delicate white-rose odor crept about her nostrils, seemed new, yet familiar, to Mrs. Drew. It had been an unpleasant step to take, this visiting a theater. Almost by means of theaters her life had been crushed. But her conscience was so pure, so content, that she enjoyed life's trifles as only those who are pure in heart can enjoy them.

As they alighted at the theater, she stopped and glanced round her, looking like some beautiful hot-house flower suddenly transported there upon the pavement, among the squalid or dirty passers-by. Mrs. Drew reminded one of flowers, of beautiful works of art—just as Lilith reminded one of rough furze-bushes, or weird trees growing askew, or of anything in nature uncouth and curious. Remarks were freely circulating, so Willie hurried the ladies in, and was glad when they were safely seated.

The crimson house—with frescoes and a painted ceiling which Lilith began to inspect through Willie's opera glasses at once—was still half lighted. There was no farce. This was one of Masterton's innovations. Masterton was the new Shakesperean star.

"No one seems to know exactly how the man jumped into popularity," said Willie, as the gas was turned up and the orchestra began a fitting prelude to the woeful love-story of Romeo and his Juliet. "There are as many stories about him as about the new Juliet, Miss Urd—yes, that is the name—too ugly a one to be assumed."

"And pray what stories are they?" asked Mrs. Drew.

"Oh, nothing against her, save that she had some nervous complaint which prevented her appearance in public! Her life was therefore a hard one, till she had a severe mental shock, which, strangely enough, restored her—completely cured the defect, whatever it was."

Here the curtain drew up, and Lilith, who looked rather more attractive in her black lace dress and with her hair damped into a certain orderliness, leaned over and said, "Oh!"

It was the first stage-picture she had seen. It took her breath away until the men in their quaint dresses began to speak; then their nineteenth-century voices, not of the highest class, broke the spell. This was a stage, these were actors—this was not another world.

Mrs. Drew had been stirred—she hardly knew why—by something that Willie had said. She forgot the transient emotion while studying her child. It was delightful to watch the action of the stage illustrated by the fleeting expressions upon Lilith's face.

But presently was heard a slight round of applause. Juliet came in, a slim girlish creature with great dark eyes and a mass of black hair. There were a grace and an intensity in the Southern-looking girl which from the first had not failed to captivate her audiences. Her neck and arms were veiled by a gossamer drapery which only those with very sharp eyes or a first-rate glass had noticed. Willie said very sympathetically to Mrs. Drew—

"Poor girl, she is not well even yet! Splendidly made up though she is, don't you see how hollow her cheeks are?"

Mrs. Drew watched her, silently accepting Willie's lorgnette. As she noticed Juliet's winning archness, as she heard the soft sweet tones of a voice that people strained to catch—it was sometimes very low, as if from girlish modesty, or a fragility suggested by Miss Urd's stillness—so instinctively she felt that she had of late heard a voice or voices that had affected her which had the plaintive sweetness of this. Then she happened to look aside—at a box where two fair children were leaning over, watching each movement on the stage and absorbed in the performance.

No sooner did she see this than a white mist grew up all around. She had gone away, as it were, into some state where there was nothing. She did not hear, see, feel, think, till suddenly Willie Macdonald grew out of the mist, and she heard the word "ill." In a moment she was able to whisper—

"The heat! But I cannot stay—I must not."

The pleading, agonized look in her beautiful eyes told Willie that some *contretemps* had occurred.

"Of course we must go, and at once," he said.

Then he nudged Lilith, who was too dazed with this novel theatrical experience to notice her mother's deadly pallor. She soon found out, though, that her darling mother was tired, ill, and was hastening to her—Mrs. Drew was leaning against the open box door, reviving in the cool air—when Willie peremptorily stopped her.

"Your mother must not be interfered with or spoken to to-night," he said. "Don't notice anything; leave her to herself as much as possible."

Then he turned to Mrs. Drew, wrapped her carefully in Mrs. Macdonald's mournful gray shawl, and, saying, "Follow us, dear, please," to Lilith, led her along the passages. He stayed at the buffet to get a glass of water. How he mentally cursed his foolery a minute afterward! A little boy, fantastically dressed, with long curls, ran up to Mrs. Drew.

"Oh, it is the lady! I said it was; didn't I, Florrie?"—to a delicate little dark-haired damsel who gravely held the hand of the elderly nurse or servant in charge. "Please kiss me;" and, before the horror-stricken Willie Macdonald, who read what this meant in Mrs. Drew's white face, could prevent him, he had thrown his arms round her neck and had kissed her lips. "The watch is going beautifully," he said, nodding his curly head. "And doesn't mamma act well? What— Oh, don't go away! In the last

scene she makes people cry like anything, and Mr. Masterton said he had two real tears in his eyes, but they didn't get out because of the paint; and Florrie and I counted twenty-three handkerchiefs out at the same time, and seven of them were men in the stalls—there!"

"We will see your mamma in the last act another day, little man," said Willie, hurrying Mrs. Drew and Lilith away down the stairs.

Then he found a secluded corner for them while he rushed wildly for a four-wheeled cab. Of course the brougham would not be in waiting; but he soon returned with a cab, and they were driven back to Prince's Square under the quiet stars.

What did this mean? Willie felt that understand Mrs. Drew and Lilith's life he would, unless Mrs. Drew would not give him her sympathy. Then of course he must look on in the dark.

"When a man meets a saintly martyr whose influence may kill all that there is mean and bad in him, then he ought to recognize the fact, and be grateful to Heaven for the meeting," he said to himself.

Perhaps never in his life had the good-natured young fellow felt so *exalté* as he did, leaning back with folded arms in the corner of the old cab. He felt religious, strong to fight, chivalrous, with a self-sacrificing devotion.

The house was already dimly lighted as the cab drew up at the door. James, who opened it, said sleepily that, the master seeming tired, Mrs. Law ordered prayers at nine, and everybody was in bed. A little supper was laid out in the dining-room. Willie, opening papers and letters that had arrived by the last post, talked almost boisterously. While the pretense of supper was proceeding, he managed to suggest that somewhat of a crisis seemed to have occurred in India, according to the Indian papers, which might seriously affect his uncle's property on the south coast. He would like Mrs. Drew's advice before he told his aunt, Mrs. Law, next morning.

"I know you thoroughly understand these matters," he said, "for I have heard that you advise Squire Ware in matters connected with the estate. Can you spare me a few minutes now?"

Both Mrs. Drew and Lilith were in too emotional a state to suspect ruses. Lilith had guessed the cause of the night's misery to her mother; but she was shy of showing sympathy; so she meekly retired, volunteering to tell Priscilla that she must wait a few minutes to undress her mother.

Willie was alone with Mrs. Drew. Mrs. Drew sat back in her chair. She was in the state of temporary exhaustion that follows fainting. She looked like some lovely lily which had been trodden under foot The white roses on her breast were crushed, the green leaves withered.

Alone with "St. Catharine," Willie suddenly felt shy and stupid. He was thoroughly embarrassed, grew red, then blurted out—

"Excuse me, Mrs. Drew; but I am so deeply interested in Lilith that I wanted to tell you so. People don't understand her. She wants, as it were, a faithful knight to watch her life and to call for help when needed. Neither my aunt nor my mother can do this. Well, I am ready to do anything--for her—and for you. Oh, it does not need much sharp-sightedness to see into your life! But,

pardon me, I ought not to have alluded to such private and sacred matters."

"I dare say you have heard my story; so there is no reason to repeat it," said Mrs. Drew, with quiet dignity. "But I may tell you that I recognized—with surprise—persons in the theater to-night that I little dreamt to see. No, there is nothing you can do for me"—for she saw Willie was about to speak, and prevented him—"nothing but notice how Lilith gets on, and see that I am summoned at once if she gets into trouble again."

"Oh, she will not do that, Mrs. Drew!"

Willie burst into enthusiastic praise of Lilith. As he said more and spoke more strongly than he had known it was in his mind to speak, Mrs. Drew smiled faintly. A slight color came back to her cheek.

"Ah! you must come and see us in the holidays," said Mrs. Drew. "You and Lilith will be even better companions at the old Hall." Then she rose and wished him good-night. "I know I may trust you," she said, leaving her hand in his, and looking earnestly into his eyes. It seemed such a serious, so terrible a thing almost, to encourage any feeling, however brotherly, that might end in this young man's loving Lilith.

"You may trust me till death, Mrs. Drew!" said Willie, with a certain passion which the occasion scarcely warranted, and which shook Mrs. Drew's confidence in her own opinion somewhat as she went gently upstairs.

What if Willie were already what they called "in love" with Lilith? The rector had suggested the possibility to her.

Oh, no; she would not worry about such an improbability! Lilith—only fifteen, and so curious-looking, so ungainly! Mrs. Drew slept peacefully. She had suffered to-night, and the pain, patiently borne, was over. She had done her duty to Lilith, and she earnestly hoped and believed, to Willie Macdonald also. What reason was there that she should not sleep?

But with Willie Macdonald it was otherwise. He had been in an emotional state all day. When he was rushing about for the box for the theater, he said stupid things, and found out he was talking nonsense only by the polite surprise and suppressed smiles of those to whom he spoke. Now, as Mrs. Drew left him, he went and threw himself into one of the high-backed dining-room arm-chairs, and there he remained for a full half-hour—not thinking, not dreaming—no, remembering. He went over each hour in the day—his surprise when he saw Lilith's mother, his uncomfortable tongue-tied sensation at luncheon, his sudden awkwardness, and his anxiety to appear at his best in her presence, his inordinate dread that she would not go to the theater, his fear that she would despise his tea, his anxious fastidious choice of those roses, his wild appeal to the totally innocent Lilith to persuade—no, to insist upon her mother's going to the theater. He recollected the delightful sensation when she came into the drawing-room, looking like some seraphic being, with dear Lilith on her arm. Fancy asking him to look after Lilith, when she would be his first care, his first thought in life! Then he recollected every beautiful pose, every graceful attitude. But moods have their rebounds. Suddenly some thought—he hardly knew

what—startled him. He cast his mood aside as if it had stung him.

"One would think I was a raw unfledged boy!" he said to himself angrily; and he put out the lights and went to bed—but not to sleep. His disgust to find himself rhapsodical kept him awake till daybreak.

CHAPTER X.

THE train was speeding fast through the rich summer morning. London, with its halo of black smoke, was far back in the distance.

Mrs. Drew was alone in a first-class compartment. She leaned back thinking—dreaming a little perhaps. She looked very sweet and sad, her delicate face more tenderly youthful in contrast to her mourning-dress, and in relief against the dark cloth of the railway-carriage.

Outside the columns of white steam fled up gayly into the sunshine. The rills rippled brightly through the meadows, the yellow corn stood tall, basking in the sun. Cottages glared white, dotted here and there, and now and then the train went puffing through an orchard, where the overladen apple-boughs lay propped above the grass and the pear-gatherers were busy. Then they would pass some quiet copse where the trees seemed drooping, as if in communion with their own shadows.

The thought came to Mrs. Drew; she likened these silently-growing trees to herself. "I have no one in the world," she told herself, "no one to tell my troubles to, to lean upon, except it be my own shadow, my thoughts."

The tears welled up and fell. Still she, a self-blamer by nature, could scarcely blame herself for these, after the terrible emotion of the preceding night, when she had not only to see and hear the actress for whom her husband had forsaken her, but had to accept acquaintanceship with the children of her dead husband and another woman.

Some women would have been almost crazy in the circumstances. But Lilian Drew had borne her husband's desertion years before calmly—so calmly that she had never raised a finger to beckon him back. Then he died. She had borne his death calmly also.

But some change had come over her; and since the day before she had felt depressed, dissatisfied. As she looked out into the fullness of nature in her summer phase, she felt as if everything in the world were of some use except herself.

Those she had left in London did not want her. Lilith, with her new hopes, aspirations, and struggles, was, as it were, launched, to struggle alone. Her husband's son—she had felt a curious yearning for the boy, and the moment he had kissed her was an emotional moment—had his own mother, whom he had lauded to her in his unsuspecting innocence. Then the girls, his sisters—what a curious position hers was in regard to these!

Yet the more Mrs. Drew thought, the more she determined that these children had a strong claim upon her—had she felt and acted differently long before, they might not have been born. To be just to them would entail much pain, much suffering to herself, per-

haps. But she fancied it her duty that all should be done for these as if they were her own.

Then she thought of Lilith and of Willie Macdonald. What if they should come to be nearer and dearer to each other? She had seen some extra interest in Willie's manner. "By and by he may love her," she thought, with a wistful, almost yearning recollection of the genial handsome face that looked so sympathetic, so earnestly kind. "And she? Oh, when Lilith loves, it will be in that devouring passionate way her father loved—that—woman!"

Back at the old townlet, Mrs. Drew felt quieted, more confident. The Rector was standing on the platform, awaiting the train with an anxious look, she thought. She went up to him, bag in hand. He smiled as she came up, seized her bag, and in a minute he was driving her home.

There was nothing wrong, he assured her, as they drove through the lanes, under the tall trees, save that, since she left, the squire had seemed fidgety and anxious. Madam Ware's calm content had irritated rather than quieted him.

"Last night I dined there," continued the Rector. "He talked of nothing but Lilith. 'Some harm was coming to the lass, alone in that crowded London,' was his fixed notion. I did not argue with him—I seldom do. But I did persuade him not to stand under the broiling sun in the harvest-field at noonday, with only his felt hat to protect him from the rays. You know his tendency to apoplexy. He ought to have one of those white Indian helmets."

"Or a straw—a Panama—with a cabbage-leaf inside, and a puggaree. I must see what I can do," said Mrs. Drew energetically. The practical details of home were already scaring away her dreamy mood.

"Then there is something else that is worrying him," continued the Rector. "Colonel Ware has returned from the East, and threatens him with a visit. What a dislike he seems to have for that heir of his! Is it personal, or only because the colonel must take the entailed property and you will have comparatively nothing?"

"Oh, it is that, most certainly!" said Lilian Drew. "I saw Geoffrey Ware only once. He was tall, imposing, and, to me, a girl of ten, seemed almost old. I remember, when he was going away, he took me up, called me 'little cousin,' and, saying I must go to him if ever I wanted protection or a friend, kissed me. My dignity was hurt more than my cheek was by his rough mustache. I told him I did not want his protection; I had my father to take care of me. He gave me a strange look, half amused, half sad. Then he turned away, mounted his big horse, and rode off. These little incidents impress children, you know; I can remember him distinctly. There is nothing to dislike in him—of that I am sure!"

The Rector, who had thoughtfully flicked his cob with his whip while Lilian Drew was speaking, said—

"Yet last night, when we were smoking among your favorite roses, all your father's talk was how to cut off the entail. He wants you and Lilith to have the Hall at any price."

"I cannot have anything of that sort," replied Mrs. Drew, red-

dening. "I do not care where I live so long as I am at peace, and I cannot be at peace if I am unjust to any one."

She meant what she said. Still the old park had seldom seemed so dear to her as when they drove through the gates. The slopes lay basking in the sun. The great oaks spread grandly over the beds of bracken. The deers' horns and short switching tails quivered in the distance, where the herd had gathered under the shade of a covert. Then they turned a corner, and the gray old walls fronted them. Her home of the past, but not of the future! How many may have felt as Lilian Drew felt at that moment, as if a simple cottage would have been a better childhood's shelter, if it might have remained home to the end!

"Anyhow I will be buried here in our vault—in the church," she said.

Then the Rector knew that Mrs. Drew might object on principle to any selfish arrangement being made on her account, but that she felt much as any other woman would have felt in her position, only she did not know it.

So, rapidly thinking, he determined to have a talk with her.

"The girls and their mother are so anxious to see you again," he suggested. "Come over to-morrow and see the butter-making and the apple-picking. The orchard is fine, 'although I say so as shouldn't,' as the villagers say."

Lilian acquiesced as they stopped at the door, where Mr. Rawson left her.

How peaceful was the great Hall, with the slowly-ticking clock, and a bumble-bee who had made his way in from the hot flower-garden buzzing and booming sleepily as he drowsily sought an exit! As she went along the corridor to her mother's little sitting-room, the lowered blinds moved to and fro in the breeze, and she saw her own flower-garden, a blaze of dahlias, hollyhocks, and late roses, and, beyond, the wigwam and the tall poplars. Opening the door gently, there was her mother in her little old-fashioned chair in the low-ceiled room with the huge cupboards. This had been the housekeeper's room in former times. But, when the squire brought his gentle little wife home, she had pleaded for this because it was like "mother's room" in the Vicarage, and she had her little whim. Lilian remembered "doing her lessons" in this room with the quaint chintz furniture, an old wheezy spaniel basking in the sunshine or firelight, and some kitten at play. She remembered biting her pen and looking out wistfully into the green park, as if she could learn from the waving boughs or of the sleek cows grazing in the deep grass. She remembered the housekeeper coming in and whispering to Madam Ware so as not to disturb Miss Lilian at her lessons, and the big cupboards being open, where all the juicy preserves and savory potted meats, besides mincemeats, conserves, rich cakes, and light biscuits, were stored. There were the old book-shelves, where Madam Ware's schoolbooks and prizes, and a few volumes such as "Rasselas," "Evenings at home," "Sandford and Merton," and other light literature for the young, were ranged. To-day the recollection that all these memories must be effaced by the occupancy of the colonel with the rough mustache—perhaps with an Indian wife and a family of dark children—gave her a pang. Mrs. Drew went

to her mother and embraced her more tenderly than ever. She fancied, as the little deaf mother took off her spectacles and began a string of inquiries about Lilith, that the withered cheeks were cold and pale. But Madam Ware stoutly defended herself on the score of health.

"Now if it was your father, my dear," she went on; and Lilian had to listen to a long account of his carelessness, which seemed so senseless, provoking serious illness when he was so exasperated at the idea of a visit from his nephew, or indeed at the idea of Colonel Ware at all. "You see, it is so contradictory, my love," said Madam Ware, who had resumed her glasses, and was settling herself to her fine plain work. "We all know the Almighty allows but threescore years and ten at the utmost. Your father is nigh upon that, for he was a man in years when we married. Yet one would think, with his fads and reckless ways, he wanted to get off sooner and make way for Geoffrey. I bear no grudge to the poor lad—he used to come here and enjoy his life—he hadn't much of a home—when you were in long clothes. But, as sure as he comes to live here, you and the dear child must turn out. What d'ye say? I turn out? I shall soon follow your father, dear. I thought that the other day, when they rooted up those two poplars which spoiled the path. They wanted to take up only one; but their roots had got twined, and they seemed to have but one bit of ground between 'em; so, when one fell, the other toppled over, and it was a business for the men to get away in time, not to be hurt. Yes, your father is down broiling his poor head among the harvesters."

"I will go to him," said Lilian.

First she went to the garret, where great chests of unused garments were kept, and routed and searched in the stuffy chamber till she found the Panama hat. Then she went to her room and covered it with a long piece of Indian muslin; then to the kitchen for a cool, firm, dewy cabbage-leaf. Then she took an umbrella, and went bravely through the hot dusty fields. The squire pretended not to care for her appearance, and asked what that gimcrack thing was. However, she dared his possible anger and saucily tossed off his hat, and, jumping up, crowned him with her bit of workmanship.

He stood a moment surprised; then, to her dismay, tears came into his eyes.

"Ay, my day's over; you're all of ye taking advantage of me!" he stammered. "Here are the men all contradicting me, and as lazy as goodness knows what! We shall never get the harvest in at this rate. Then up comes my daughter and makes me a Tom Fool, like I used to see them at the booth in the fair. Ah, I haven't the pluck to scold you for your impudence—that I haven't! Here, take me home; a stick ain't enough to hold up my old bones now! I have come to lean upon the arm of a gal," he went on mournfully, as Lilian coaxed him over the stubble toward the gate into the lane—"the arm of a gal, and not upon a right-down big mottled limb, like wenches had in my days, but a poor little thin splinter. Then I'm a regular target for the railway-telegraphs; they make a butt of me, they do. Here's one!" he said, stopping short with a disgusted expression, and pulling out a crumpled yellow envelope. "Read that!

Lucky for him you're at home! I don't mean to have anything to do with him. You're of age, and can do as you please."

Lilian read a telegram from Colonel Geoffrey Ware to his uncle, which informed the squire that his nephew had just returned from the East, and would run down to see his uncle "on the day after to-morrow, if convenient."

"I suppose you sent an answer?" asked Mrs. Drew.

"I wrote on the paper they brought me, 'Do as you like. We old folks ain't of any account nowadays.'"

'Then I think he won't come," said Lilian. "I wish you had not been quite so—so abrupt," she added.

"Oh, then you want to see the man who's going to turn you out?" said the squire. "You women are queer animals! I'll be bound you'll make a fuss with the fellow—hang upon him and flatter him as soon as my coffin's in the old vault! Oh, yes! What's that they used to say? 'The king is dead—long live the king!'"

Mrs. Drew managed to "talk over" her father, and left him in his smoking-room, with his favorite long pipe and a fresh copy of the "County Gazette," to go to her mother. She had seen by the telegram that her cousin the colonel was to arrive that day. Madam Ware knew nothing of the telegram. However, she had adaptable maid-servants, and pure white sheets smelling of lavender were soon upon the big bed in the state guest room. The summer wind was blowing in at the window. The gardener had to cut flowers; and, before Mrs. Drew joined her mother for a cup of tea, the room to be occupied by the colonel was in perfect order.

Feeling dusty after her journey, and wishing to be on the spot when the colonel arrived, lest he should be received by her deaf mother—to whom it was still a trouble to be misunderstood or bawled at—Mrs. Drew went to her room to change her dress. Mary was unpacking her bag, and was looking wonderingly at a mass of withered flowers. It was unlike her mistress to pack away such "muck," she was thinking.

"I see Miss Lilith packed your bag for you, ma'am," she observed, with a smile.

"No." said Mrs. Drew. Although she blushed, she took the dead roses from Mary's hands, and laid them carefully on her writing-table, telling the maid to bring her one of the white dresses. "It is so hot that I think I may indulge myself in a cool dress with a broad black sash to-night, Mary," she said, in the usual confidential manner she adopted toward the faithful nurse.

As she dressed, she told Mary much about her nursling, Lilith. But, when Mary was dismissed, those puzzling dead flowers were still on the writing-table, unaccounted for.

"She can't paint them dead things, sure-ly!" thought Mary, as she went back to the housekeeper's room, wondering what they were —what they signified.

To Lilian Drew they were a memento of that yesterday which she believed to be a crisis in her life, because it had awakened stronger feeling than she had yet known—how or why she thought, as she locked away the faded flowers, she could not tell.

"We are all mysteries," she mused, as she went down to stroll

toward her favorite haunts, "but, most of all, mysteries to ourselves."

The garden was basking in the sun. The terraces, with their flower-stands, were glaring to the eyes, as Mrs. Drew passed out. Shading her eyes with her parasol, she saw the heat rising giddily between her and the poplars. She turned away from the garden, and took the path to the shrubbery. No one could drive from the station to the Hall without passing the shrubbery. The dog-cart sent to the station to be in waiting for Colonel Ware must pass here; but, as the carriage-road took a curve and diverged, she would have time to be in the Hall to receive her cousin, if she hastened back through the garden.

The shrubbery was cool, a very grove for meditation. Moist mosses clung to the tree-trunks. The thickest boughs that overhung the path had so many sister-boughs above them that they could never have seen the sun; nor could the tall green ferns, nor the myriads of tiny flowers which had survived the lovely blossoms that spring had carried away with her when she abdicated in favor of hot summer. The sturdy nut-trees were dotted over with green nuts, the blackberries were reddening among the thorns. Then came a break in the wood; some big trees had been felled—their planed trunks were woodland seats. There was a grass-plot of tall grass, with some beds of half-tended wild-flowers. Lilith and her mother would let no scythe, pruning-knife, or scissors transform their "wilderness," as they called it, into trim garden-land. The tending of this grove was done by their own hands. From here there was visible a really English landscape—first, the park, with tall trees, then sloping fields; beyond, hazy lilac hills.

Mrs. Drew seated herself on one of the planed trunks. To be here, where she had thought, and remembered, and dreamed her more than widowed life, was, after the previous day's whirl and to-day's action, like sudden rest to one over-strained, over-fatigued, almost a pain at first. But in a few minutes she felt how good was her quiet drifting to the human being's natural end—here, where she was born, where she had lived her calm girl-life, and where she had endured her married sorrow. It seemed impossible to her that she should ever, in life, leave this nest.

"Yet yesterday, until I was tortured at the theater, I thought there was brightness, happiness in London life," she reflected, ashamed. "I have not valued this enough. But I shall now."

She had been shading herself with her parasol. But the sun was already sinking to the level of the hills opposite, and the air had perceptibly cooled. So she shut her parasol, and, as she did so, rose, for she saw she was not alone in the "wilderness." A man was standing leaning against a tree that bordered the grass-plot. He was neatly but somewhat shabbily dressed. He was tall, stout, middle-aged, with white hair and mustache. The empty sleeve looped up, the military bearing, a certain familiarity in the profile—for he was gazing out into the park—told Mrs. Drew that this was the expected guest.

"Colonel Ware—Cousin Geoffrey!" she exclaimed, going across to him with extended hand.

There is always greater sweetness in self-conquerors; and the

travel-worn, tired man—who was himself performing a scarcely agreeable duty in this early visit to Heathside—thought the greeting of this slight fragile woman with the pensive resigned face the sweetest welcome he had had for many a long year.

"Lilian!" he said, just touching her hand respectfully with his lips. "The little girl who was so greatly offended because I thought she might possibly require the services of some one besides the squire! Remembering what you were, I was quite taken aback when I saw you in deep meditation under your parasol. I thought the parasol would move or slip aside; but no! I have been contemplating the lines and spike of a parasol for the last ten minutes—a thing I never did in my life before. Well, how is the squire?"

"Oh, well—as well as usual!" said Mrs. Drew—they were walking along the path toward the house. "A little startled by your telegram perhaps," she continued diplomatically. "He dislikes innovations—railways, electricity. It is a positive grief to him that the Highflyer coach no longer plies between Westtown and London. He groans whenever he looks at the pictures of the dashing equipage with the four thoroughbreds which hang in his smoking-room; and people who know him don't send him telegrams if they can help it."

"Well, that is a relief so far," remarked the colonel. "Really, I assure you, your father sent me such a strange telegram that I came down here believing he hated the sight of me, and therefore skulked toward the house under covert, leaving my man and your groom discussing a glass of beer at the Railway Inn, with strict injunctions not to follow for at least half an hour. Now is your father offended because I have not written all these years? You know men baking under a tropical sun are not good correspondents, and I always believed he distrusted me."

"Oh, it is not that!" said Lilian.

She spoke hastily, and betrayed herself. She blushed. How could she repair her mistake? There was silence for a minute; then the colonel, opening the gate with his one arm—the right—said dryly—

"I understand, Mrs. Drew; but surely you and your mother, who was so good to me, trust me?"

"Trust you? Of course." Mrs. Drew was crimson now. "You are to succeed us here, and we have the proper feeling for our heir. But," she continued warmly, "you cannot expect us not to connect you with the idea of my father's death. He must die—his coffin must come empty into the Hall, and be carried away full to the vault—before we can see you head of everything here."

"Well, who said I could be head of everything here?" said the colonel somewhat brusquely, standing between Lilian and the narrow path that led to the terraces, so that she must either make a rush across a bed of young lettuces or stop short. "Do you think a man who has led an active military life wants to turn farmer and to stagnate? I can assure you I have no taste for vegetation. I am an heir against my will; and it is just to see what can be legally done to exclude my life-interest in this estate that I have come to-day. Before I leave, the affair will be righted."

"Righted? But your wife, your children?" asked Mrs. Drew, puzzled and somewhat discomfited.

"Madam, with all due respect to your charming sex, I am a happy bachelor," said the colonel, "and I expect to remain so. But really," he added, changing his tone, "I did not expect to arrive primed with a declaration of my intentions, or with a species of challenge. Let us talk the matter over, you and I—the co-heirs—by ourselves. The squire is hale and hearty—he will last long, please Heaven! We are the old people's props, their children."

Lilian held out her hand and looked gratefully at this fraternal cousin. He clasped her hand, dropped it, and they went into the house.

"Here is our own particular hat-stand, cousin," said Lilian, as they entered the house by the garden-door. "I will go and see where they are."

Then she smiled at him and went off quickly with her elastic step. She had long forbidden herself to run, as unbefitting her matronhood. But, as the colonel looked after her, he recognized the child Lilian in the slight figure with the small well-molded head that went flitting along the corridor into the shadow.

"She is as little changed as the dear old home itself," he thought, as he walked into the quiet hall, and recognized the old clock with its steady solemn tick, the cases of stuffed birds, the faded pictures—even the slim red fox that had always seemed to look down spitefully upon him from his perch above the old oak book-case. "Home—home—what a beautiful word! Rest, peace, content, love—but not for me," he added, resolutely, buttoning his coat and preparing himself for the meeting with "the squire and madam"—"not for me!"

CHAPTER XI.

MADAM WARE received her husband's nephew ceremoniously in the drawing-room with the high-backed chairs. He entered with his military semi-abruptness. It was like walking back into childhood. He remembered playing with the cat all about those ottomans and tables laden with china, and how a sudden spring of the cat knocked off a beautiful Sèvres cup, and Madam Ware, then but a slim girl in pink muslin, came in with her baby on her arm, sat down on an ottoman, and chided him gently in a hushed voice, lest Baby Lilian should awake. He could see it all, though thirty-odd years had passed—the pink face and tiny hands of the sleeping baby, the cat crouching under the heavy folds of the curtain, the shell-like fragments of the broken cup on the thick carpet, the family portraits frowning on the walls, and the girl-mother whose quaint gentle ways made him much more afraid of her than he was of his head-master at school.

Could that little lady, looking so much older than she really was in her straight black satin gown and big cap tied under her chin, be that vision in the pink muslin? She was as much like it as Mrs. Drew was like the sleeping babe.

Madam Ware, who was alone, rose from her seat, and, advancing

a few steps, said a few kind words of welcome. Then she drew a chair near to hers, and, motioning him to be seated, said—

"I do not think I should have known you, Geoffrey."

"Nor I you," he said. "And my cousin—she is changed too."

"Of course you have heard all about her unfortunate marriage?"

Geoffrey Ware confessed that he had. He knew that Lilian had been heartlessly deserted; that she had lived with her parents while her husband was publicly owning a second family abroad; and that "the man" who had disgraced his manhood and degraded his military calling was dead.

"The fellow is dead," he said, in a contemptuous tone. "At least you have that consolation."

"Oh, dear!" returned Madam Ware, distressed. "I hope you will never, on any account, speak like that to Lilian. She will not have her husband disparaged. She is right, of course. And pray do not speak to the squire in that way; he felt it all so very much, and, if anything happens to remind him of it, he is set off, as it were—"

"Hush!" said the colonel. He had heard footsteps on the terrace which were inaudible to deaf Madam Ware.

Lilian Drew and her father came in together through the long window. The squire looked half angry, half pleased; Mrs. Drew was smiling. Their interview had been almost comical. The squire's dislike to the man who must succeed him was no stronger than the natural philanthropy which was generally concealed by his irritability and gruffness; so that he had alternately said he had "no grudge against poor Davie's boy—just the reverse"—but that he felt as if "the sight of the fellow" would give him "a fit." When Mrs. Drew told her father Colonel Ware's ideas, he softened utterly, and muttered that nothing should induce him to hear of such stuff and nonsense. Cut off the entail indeed! As if he would be a party to such dirt cast upon his brother's memory! "A Ware is a Ware, when all's said and done," he said; "and, as for you gals, why, it's your misfortune that you've been born gals, and to grumble would be to fly in the face of the Almighty; so you've got to grin and bear it, and make the best of a bad job."

At these words Mrs. Drew, inwardly triumphant that the squire was in a fitting mood to meet the colonel, hung her head and said that that was exactly how she felt.

"Women must expect to be second in the race," she had said, as they were nearing the window; "and, when they are content to be so, they may be quite satisfied that they will be taken care of."

"At all events, you and the child will," said the squire energetically.

Then he went off across the drawing-room and held out his hand. He gave Geoffrey's hand a hearty shake; then he said—

"Well, you're about as much like poor Davie as Lilian's like me. I say, madam," he went on, raising his voice, "just look at these two here! Here—this big burly fellow"—slapping his back—"don't wince at a clout which would ha' knocked his father over, and I—who'd ha' made six of Davie—I own this poor pale pretty wench! Oh, yes, you're pretty enough, my girl," he said, drawing her hand within his arm—"too pretty perhaps! It ain't the pretty

ones as do the best for themselves. I was only thinking that folks would have guessed our fine colonel yonder to be mine, and you—Davie's. But that's the way of the world—all askew!"

"But all comes right in the end, uncle," put in the colonel, in his sonorous voice.

He was relieved, gratified at his reception; and when dinner was announced he escorted his aunt—who had always wanted an arm to lean on since she broke her ankle a year or two back—carefully, tenderly, feeling that, after all, blood was thicker than water.

The dinner passed off pleasantly. The fresh damask, the polished silver, the fruit and flowers under the soft light of shaded wax-candles, seemed exquisite luxury to Geoffrey Ware, even after long years of Oriental arrangements. He liked to be waited upon once more by "his kind," as he called Europeans, who stepped bravely, and did not creep and sidle swiftly and silently like the Indian servants. The massive sideboard, set out with the family plate, was pleasant to his eyes. The soft evening light outside—the blinds were up and the windows open—was calming to the mind. The squire's hock was choice. Lilian Drew, leaning back in her chair and fanning herself slowly, her eyes fixed dreamily upon her empty dessert-plate, looked as if she were thinking of heaven. She was merely, though, wondering whether she ought to postpone her visit to the Rectory on the morrow.

"Certainly you ought, my love," said her mother, as they settled themselves in the drawing room, Mrs. Drew at her tambour-frame, Mrs. Ware at her knitting. "We ought to show Geoffrey all respect while he is here. I am sure he is a kind, good man, though old for his years. He was a nice boy, a little wild—but all boys are." Then she wondered what they could do to amuse him, and made suggestions by the dozen.

But the colonel did not seem to miss the ladies. He stayed smoking down-stairs with his uncle, talking of the estate and hearing the squire's lengthy tales of all the small bickerings and law-suits with neighboring landowners, and disagreements with cantankerous or stubborn tenants, as if the subject were the chief interest of his life.

As a matter of fact, it was; for his monotonous life had been so uneventful. His father and mother were both dead, his two sisters were married and in India. He liked them very well, but had not taken sufficiently keen interest in their families to please them; so, living hundreds of miles apart, and meeting perhaps once a year, or less often, they were gradually estranged. He had been in love once; but the girl was engaged to be married to a brother-officer, so he sternly smothered a keen and troublesome passion, and looked coldly at the lady, who would glance at him wistfully with a peculiar sympathy, wondering what could make Colonel Ware dislike her so much. Had she known what hours of disgust with life she cost the colonel, there might have been a very different future in store for many others.

Colonel Ware loved his profession. Outside it, he lived a dead level. His dreariness urged him to think of foregoing his rights, and he returned to England with his regiment, resolved to resign what he could in favor of "that poor injured woman and her child." What could he do at Heathside? he thought, until to-night, when,

as the squire talked, he seemed to see so clearly how much there really was he could do to improve and regulate the estate. He had almost forgotten his resolution that all was really and morally Lilian Drew's, when a bell tinkled, and the squire exclaimed—

"Why, if it isn't madam's bell for her maid! Eleven o'clock! I couldn't ha' believed it. It reminds me of the old days when I sat and talked with your father. Poor lad—poor Davie! He always was up to the mark, ready for everything. It seems a shame the good should go and blackguards be left. I don't mean you—that rascal, you know."

"Yes, yes," said the colonel, changing the subject; he must say good night to the ladies.

"To-morrow—or the first opportunity—I must come to an understanding with Lilian," he thought, as they went upstairs all together and interchanged good nights.

But the next day and the day after that came and went, and he had done nothing to break the ice. Why he did not know. It was chance, he thought, or perhaps a reluctance to break in upon this oasis in his desert of a life. He was charmed, fascinated by his surroundings. In the early morning he strolled in the garden with Mrs. Drew, and held her garden-basket while she cut the dewy roses and fern-fronds for the tables; and, while showing him by her tender caressing of the plants, by her knowledge of each one as if they were semi-living friends, that a garden is another life to a garden-lover, she coaxed him to smoke over some rose-tree threatened with fly, or to help her to prune her favorites that were already shedding their leaves.

Then came breakfast with the squire, who was in a singularly good temper.

"I never saw your father more pleased with any one," Mrs. Ware confided to her daughter; "I cannot quite understand it."

After breakfast the two went off round the farm, talking quite confidentially together. Then the colonel appeared punctually at luncheon, and, after the sun had begun to lessen its fierce scorching, he and Mrs. Drew rode. In the evening the unused piano was open, and Lilian played while the colonel leaned back in a chair and dreamed. Nearer fifty than forty, white-haired, comparatively old—and this was his first real taste of woman's society! He could not bring himself to break the spell—to think of business, of lawyers and entail and charges upon the estate, and deeds and dry-as-dust worldly matters. While Lilian played her simple airs—short movements of Mozart, choice bits of Handel, or the poetical dreams of Mendelssohn—Colonel Ware thought illogically of the future. If he took the estate, he would settle his own fortune on Lilian—the fortune partly inherited from his father, "poor Davie," partly saved and accumulated through his singularly frugal habits. Then he would insist upon her occupancy of the Hall, while he would settle down in the bailiff's house and would look after the estate—would be his own bailiff, in fact. It did not occur to the good colonel that he was somewhat anticipating matters, and that the squire might even outlive him, and thereby let the property lapse to some distant relative, who would take matters as they were and be thankful—any

more than he did not think it a strange thing for Lilian to allude to her father's future death within ten minutes of his arrival.

The days went by. Once or twice he began a hesitating allusion to his departure. The second time, the squire, who was lighting his pipe, turned suddenly upon him with a red face, and between his angry puffs said—

"No more o' that, lad, or you and I'll quarrel. What! Tired of us already?"

Colonel Drew stammered. Of course his uncle must know how he liked the place—the place which was more like home than any other. After his poor father's death, the home soon after presided over by a step-father had imbittered his life; India he had never liked. He paused suddenly, fearing lest he should have offended his uncle; but the squire was smoking away contentedly, regarding his nephew with half-closed twinkling eyes. He was silent for a moment, then he stopped, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and gave a curious chuckle.

"Ah, I bet you'll like the old place even better by and by!" he said, taking up his hat. "Now I'm going to ride round to the Rectory on business. You dance attendance on the women-folk for one morning; it won't do you harm, and it pleases them. Mind me, Geoff—if you want peace in the house, you must be in the women's good books, especially when there's two of 'em. You can get round one; but two—well, a wise man don't attempt it!"

"They will not like my staying on," began the colonel uneasily.

"Not like it? Well, all I can say is you've put my nose out of joint; I'm nobody now. Good-by."

The squire was gone. He had stumped along the passage whisting—actually whistling—"The Bold Dragoon!"

Colonel Ware sat down, got up, then began to pace the room. He was startled by his uncle's words, but still more by his manner.

"What did he mean?" he asked himself. "He meant something. He thinks something—he hinted something. What?"

Such wild fancies buzzed about him that he felt that he would go to Mrs. Drew and settle the matter at once. He would rather go—much rather go, he thought. There was a sore bitter feeling in his heart which should not be there, he knew; he did not want his aunt and cousin's tolerance.

"I am ungrateful," he said to himself. Then he went to find Mrs. Drew.

He was in the habit of going in and out everywhere, as if he were the son of the house. Madam Ware treated him almost as if he were her son, and Lilian as if he were her brother. Although she had not touched upon painful subjects connected with her life-history, Mrs. Drew had confided all her hopes and sentiments about her only child to her cousin, till he had grown almost to dislike Lilith. He had seen too much of lithe brown women with fierce black eyes and tangled hair. Then he disliked women assuming in any way the *rôles* of men. He had not been into the painting-room to see Lilith's pictures on the walls. Lilith had been the one flaw in his contentment at Heathside Hall. Now the content was over.

"Mrs. Drew is in the parlor, sir," said Mary, meeting him with

a white apron full of lavender, she being on her way to the linen-presses. "Oh, yes, pray go in, sir; there's only cook there!"

Lilian was giving out the stores, as was the old-fashioned custom maintained at Heathside Hall. The cook was piling them on a big tray. When Colonel Ware entered, he heard the clank of the keys as Lilian shut the door of the big cupboard.

"Oh, it is you!" she said, with slight surprise. Then, woman-like, seeing that he was annoyed, or the prey of some emotion, she at once assumed her armor of amiable commonplace, and asked if he remembered the room. "Surely you used to creep about the cupboards when mother was meddling with the sweets? I did, and so did Lilith after me."

"Yes," answered the colonel absently, drawing a deep breath. He felt oppressed, weighed down. "I shall never forget any day spent here—any room in the house, any tree in the garden; but I doubt that I shall see Heathside again. I have decided to go at once."

Mrs. Drew looked at him seriously.

"Sit down there, cousin; I will talk to you in a minute," she said, motioning him to the old sofa in the window. Then she carefully tidied the table, folding paper, rolling up string, placing books in neat piles; after which she went and sat down by the colonel. "Why this sudden determination?" she said. "Are you not rash? Tell me, what is it?"

"I cannot understand your father—he is so peculiar."

"Oh, is that all?" said Mrs. Drew. "Poor dear, he really means so well—only he cannot hold his tongue. He calls us women chatterboxes; but he is worse. I never think of noticing anything he says."

"As for that, he asked me to stay; but it was in such a strange way. He said—"

"Oh, don't think of what he said!" said Mrs. Drew kindly. "I assure you both he and dear mother could not like you better if you were—their—own—son."

She said the last words slowly—her voice fell. It was one of those moments when Lilian Drew felt that she had been a disappointment.

She was thinking of the time before her birth, when preparations for an heir had been made—thinking of the blankness it must have been when her mother showed a little girl-child to the squire, instead of the bold boy he had been prematurely boasting about. But the colonel heard the words in a different way. It was as if he had been blind, and suddenly saw what the squire and perhaps others had seen before him. Both he and Lilian were free. They were cousins certainly; but—

He turned and looked firmly but passionately at his cousin. Her delicate profile was visible; Lilian was looking wistfully away into the park. He laid his hand lightly on hers; she turned. What a sweet face it was! There were lines drawn by mental pain; but there was such serenity—it was like gazing at an unstained lily.

"I will do what you think best—go, or stay," said Geoffrey Ware, in his ordinary voice and assuming his ordinary manner—"whichever will be best for us all."

"That is rather a serious view to take of such a passing affair," observed Lilian cheerfully. "I should like, of all things, for us all to be real, true friends. Relatives are not always so. I wish you would go out and forget what my father said, Geoffrey," she went on pleadingly. "Go and ride. You would really be doing me a great service if you would go to Armchurch to order me some things I want; then, after luncheon, we could walk over to the Rectory—I am going to have tea there to-day The girls are charming; I meant you to have seen them before. We can talk over your going away during our walk."

"Do you wish me to do as you please?" asked Colonel Ware. "Remember, to dictate is a responsibility."

"I will not dictate anything but what is right."

"Naturally," said the colonel, rising. "That was not the question. Do you wish to dictate to me?"

"I like to ask you what I think is for the best," said Lilian. She was getting puzzled with these curious observations.

"You do—actually and really?" The colonel was terribly serious.

"Of course," said Lilian, feeling uneasy. "I love to see people happy, or at least doing well by themselves and by others."

"I will obey you, cousin, in all but one point—let that be understood; but that I reserve."

"Something about the estates?"

"Yes."

Lilian frowned, and considered for a moment. She thought her cousin odd, quixotic, hasty, and often incomprehensible; she would temporize for to-day, at least. This afternoon she would consult the Rector, if she could get him alone; she believed that she was empowered to refuse any transfer of property to herself. In any case, there would be some way out of such a transaction.

"Do you accept my proposal—for me to play number two in affairs to be decided—excepting in one particular?" said the colonel emphatically.

Again Lilian hesitated Then she said slowly—

"Yes."

The colonel said no more, but abruptly left her.

"What is the matter with him?" said Lilian Drew to herself. "Oh, men, men, they are difficult! It is bad enough with papa, who speaks out; but it is worse with those who won't. What are their secrets, after all, when you do find them out? Either nothing worth knowing, or nothing that you want to know. How fortunate Lilith is to have that dear boy Willie at her elbow!"

Then Mrs. Drew's thoughts fled to London, and her hand instinctively sought her pocket, where Lilith's letters were—Lilith's letters with Willie Macdonald's postscripts.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. DREW came to luncheon, determined to be gay. The colonel had returned from his ride. He was standing looking moodily out at the garden, wondering why the neat beds of blossom he had liked

so much looked garish—ugly almost—to-day. He had felt the sun cantering along the roads. The heat and the dust annoyed him. He thought the scenery monotonous.

"The soul of punctuality as usual," said Mrs. Drew, as she came in.

The colonel, turning round quickly, saw that she was dressed in black. The dress was light and gauzy. But black he had always disliked, and now he felt as if Lilian were flaunting her mourning in his face. He took his seat by his aunt, less amiably disposed than usual. However, Mrs. Drew was too subtle for him. Without his knowing it, she coaxed him into a good temper. Then, after luncheon, as they walked, first through the park, then through a half-cut harvest-field and a green copse, he felt his better humor returning. Already this cousin of his had a greater influence over him than any woman had had, except—except—

"Do you know that you remind me very much of a lady I once knew in India?" he said, abruptly, as they emerged from the shady wood into the Rector's fields. "It is not your face," he said, glancing down. "No; your faces are not in the least alike, except that you are both fair. It is something in the manner, in the voice."

Lilian merely said "Oh!" But before they reached the Rectory she had learned the facts of Colonel Ware's love-story, and he hardly knew that he had, contrary to his reticent habit, told Mrs. Drew what he had never before told to a fellow-creature; he only knew that he felt softened, content—especially when, after listening in sympathetic silence, Lilian looked up and said—

"Perhaps it was as well. Marriage—well, the word means such fearful chances, such lotteries of mischievous torments—at least to me! Think you are well off, Geoffrey! At least, you are not afraid to remember."

As she said the last words, almost in a whisper, she opened the Rectory garden gate.

Colonel Ware glanced approvingly at the low thatched house. Though it lay in the sunlight, it looked cool with its green venetians and the rustic porch, beyond which he could see through the narrow passage into the shady orchard. The Rector enjoyed the fresh summer air, and persisted in living with doors and windows open, in spite of his wife's declarations that in summer the house was no better than a trap for flies, gnats, wasps, and bees.

As their footsteps clattered on the red tiles when they walked between the spiky lavender-bushes and hollyhocks, the fuchsias and the tall dahlias with their shell-flower blooms, out came the Rector.

"Welcome, welcome, if you have tarried, Lilian!" he said; then he shook hands with the colonel, and led them through the corridor into Mrs. Rawson's little drawing-room.

"I will call the girls and my wife," he said; "they are busy with a sillabub."

Mrs. Drew sat down. The colonel gravely inspected the sitting-room. The low ceiling with its heavy beam, the bay-window hung about with ivy, the stained floor with the holland-covered furniture, the old spinnet, the mirror surmounted by a gilt eagle, reflecting the room in delicate miniature, pleased him. Then there was a mili-

tary, mathematical neatness delightful to a soldier who had a dash of the martinet in his composition.

"This does not look like unhappy marriage, at all events," he said, in a low voice to Lilian.

In this cottage with the open doors it came naturally to visitors to speak low, for they could hear the little chattering noises and voices from the kitchen, the creak of footsteps above, all the sounds that are lost in a vast house with thick walls.

"No," said Lilian doubtfully.

She knew that the Rector, with his open hearted charitableness, and his wife, a somewhat hard disciplinarian, were scarcely an ideal couple. But the colonel thought her opinions naturally warped by her wretched experiences.

"I wonder," he was beginning to think vaguely, when in came a plump woman—Mrs. Rawson.

"My dearest Lilian!" she said, embracing her. "And of course this is the colonel. I remember you so high," she was saying to her future landlord, when two bright girls in neat muslin dresses ran in.

Kate and Mary were pink-cheeked fair damsels, with pretty fair hair—Mary tall and brown-eyed, Kate shorter, paler, and thinner than her sister, as became an authoress who had many hours of anxiety in the manufacture of children's stories. They blushed, but were so cordial, though so unaffectedly shy of the colonel, that he liked them at once, hating as he did their opposite—the self-possessed assertive girl who seemed to him to have spontaneously generated with steam, gas, and electricity.

The Rector and a rustic handmaiden bearing a tray of glasses came in together. Then Mrs. Rawson went out and returned with a great china bowl of sillabub.

"You must excuse want of ceremony," she said, as she carefully placed the bowl upon the table; "but country wenches must not be trusted with old heirlooms, Colonel Ware. Their very nervousness would make the things slip through their fingers."

The colonel gravely accepted and drank a glass of sillabub, standing silently with his back to the window, while Mrs. Rawson and her daughters fluttered about Mrs. Drew; they all seemed to laugh and talk at once. Then a fluffy spaniel rushed into the room and careered round the center table, making the glasses clatter, and Mary, on her hands and knees to capture him, gave a little shriek which was echoed by a gray parrot hanging in a big cage among the roses outside the window. The Rector was talking to his guest about local matters, the estate, the squire, the church; and Colonel Ware said "Yes" or "No" here and there, without grasping the sense of Mr. Rawson's words. This was to him like a perfectly-colored picture suddenly come to life; it fascinated him. Lilian had taken off her hat, and, with her upraised gleaming eyes and her hands clasped upon her knee, white against her black dress, looked what she was, as if naught rough, or rude, or coarse could touch, or influence, or harm her.

He awakened suddenly when Mr. Rawson asked him, in a raised voice, which would he see first, the dairy and the farm-yard, or the

church—the Rector had asked this question twice, and set the future squire down as being slightly hard of hearing.

"You were here as a boy," continued Mr. Rawson; "but I do not suppose your tastes led you to inspect the brasses or to decipher the epitaphs on the old tombs of the De la Warres, as they were then named. We have some ancient records of your family, colonel, locked away in the safe in the vestry." Then he gave an account of the finding of these parchments in a worm-eaten chest with rusty iron clamps, and how the squire would have nothing to do with them.

"It is scarcely in my father's style," said Mrs. Drew, smiling. "Indeed he has a sort of horror of old books. Are you interested in black-letter records of the Knights de la Warre, Geoffrey? One was a Crusader."

Colonel Ware felt just then that he would be interested in anything if Lilian's eyes would always look as bright as they did now. A new longing to give this wronged woman pleasure, to bring the color permanently to her cheek and lips—that crimson which is almost the hall-mark of the gay and untroubled—seemed to spring up within him. She had grown more to him now that she knew the one love-episode of his life; it was a tie between them. So he agreed to visit all that was to be seen, in the order the ladies might propose.

"Then, my dear," said Mr. Rawson, "perhaps you will take the colonel to the dairies, and we will walk up to the church after tea."

While the girls and their mother got their garden hats—Mrs. Rawson talking briskly to Colonel Ware, as her husband by a peculiar glance had intimated to her to do—the Rector bent over Lilian.

"While they are gone there is something I wish to speak to you about. Oh, not Lilith!"—for Mrs. Drew looked anxious. "I go to you for news of her; she neglects her poor old godfather dreadfully. No; it is about one of your many pensioners. Suppose we take a stroll in the orchard?"

Mrs. Drew took his arm and went out with him. The colonel looked annoyed, but endeavored to please his new acquaintances by being interested in the long low white dairy, where the big round pans of cream stood on the spotless shelves, where the monthly roses came peeping through the wired windows, and where all was so cool, fresh, and sweet, from the bunches of herbs hanging from the ceiling to the yellow pats of butter under their muslin veils. He could see the Rector and Lilian as they walked slowly across the long grass under the apple-trees, and wondered what serious matter they could be discussing so earnestly. The Rector's hands were clasped behind him; he walked slowly. Lilian stopped short now and then, and seemed to appeal to aim.

Some day perhaps he would know, he was just thinking, with far graver truth than he imagined, when his cheerful little hostess told him he must now inspect her fowls; she would like his opinion of her new Cochin-Chinas.

Meanwhile the Rector was unwillingly telling Mrs. Drew news that was scarcely pleasant to her to hear. The actress-mother of the children—Captain Drew's orphans—had had a relapse. Her former nervous disease had returned, and her voice was utterly gone.

"My own belief is that she is dying," said the Rector. "I can-

not, of course, sympathize with her as I can with the—the children. But the one I think of most in the affair is yourself." Then he told Lilian the actual situation. Some relatives—possibly the parents of the unfortunate woman—had appeared after she had resumed the stage and had made a success. Then all had seemed to go smoothly—the children were well cared for; but now it was the reverse. "Of course, the world would say, Let them alone; let their natural guardians do their worst," he continued. "But you and I cannot think that."

"How did you know it?" asked Lilian. It seemed but the other day that she saw the woman for whom she had been forsaken, and her husband's children, almost in the sunshine of life, well dressed, admired. "Did you go—did you see her when you took her the money?"

"No," said the Rector. Then he broke to Lilian how he had found a travel-stained, forsaken, dirty little lad, lying half faint, half asleep, under a hedge; the child had sprained his ankle, blistered his feet; his cap had been stolen by tramps. "In fact, he was such a miserable object that, until the bailiff's wife had washed the dirt from his curls and we had dressed his scratched face, I had no idea who it was."

"Gerald!" said Mrs. Drew, turning pale. This second family seemed to haunt her very life.

The Rector bowed his head.

"Of course they do not know here," he said. "He is being nursed at the bailiff's. But the question now arises—what to do with him?"

"Let me go to him—at once!" exclaimed Mrs. Drew.

"Stay, stay!" said the Rector. "For what good? It was wrong of the boy to run away: he knew my address, but he knows neither your name nor who you are. Why should he ever learn? Far best to let me arrange matters as I have hitherto done. We can talk over how and when, when the lad is well. But I thought you ought to know."

Lilian thought for a moment.

"I must see him," she said resolutely, turning to leave the orchard.

The house of the Rectory farm-bailiff was a stone's-throw from the Rectory itself. Leaving the orchard by a door in the wall, they crossed a narrow lane and went along a field-path which led to the low thatched cottage with its shady garden. The harvest-apples were red among the leaves. There was a scent of warm fruit, of the roses the bailiff's wife prided herself upon—those grafted by the Rector himself, who was always ready to encourage love of flowers among his flock.

The bailiff's wife was drawing water from a well in a shady corner. She came forward, wondering to see Mrs. Drew, with the Rector, there.

"How is the lad, Mrs. Pavitt?" asked the Rector kindly. Then he dropped his voice and told Mrs. Pavitt that Mrs. Drew had come to visit their foundling, but he had better see him first. "Is he better to-day?" he added.

"Well, sir," said the woman doubtfully, "it's hard to say. He

eats next to nothing, and seems fretful like. I stopped up with him last night, but he kept starting in his sleep and calling, 'Mother, I'm coming!' He tells me his mother is ill. So I said, Why run away from her then?' At which he said it was to get help. I told him it was an odd way to get help, to walk out days and days all the way from London here. But he only stares with his big eyes, and picks at the blanket."

"You wait here for a minute," said Mr. Rawson to Mrs. Drew.

He went along the narrow passage to the room where the sick boy lay, and Mrs. Drew stayed in Mrs. Pavitt's sitting-room, sitting by the window and watching her little children at play in the garden.

Mrs. Drew had a natural love for little ones, with their funny babbling talk, their pink wondering faces, their chubby limbs, and all those odd little ways which reminded her of the silly white lambs in early spring, or the stupid inquisitive pups which she visited in the stable-yard, or the fluffy round yellow balls, the infant chickens. So she listened patiently to Mrs. Pavitt's account of how Tommy's throat had been bad ever since the scarlet-fever, and Jenny there, she was a lazy little lass, but play did her good. The Rector grumbled because she did not attend school as he thought she ought to. But there—what would Tommy do without Jenny to look after him? She was busy with the master's dinner of a morning, and cleaning up, and doing a bit in the garden betimes.

Here she stopped short, for the Rector's footstep was audible in the passage. Mrs. Drew stood up, her heart beating as it always would beat when her life-story was brought back to her.

"I have told him you are here, and to a certain extent who you are," said Mr. Rawson to Mrs. Drew in an undertone. "It has excited him very much. Of course he knows nothing about the—the curious relationship, or rather circumstances," he added hastily. "He knows you only as a merciful benefactress; indeed I believe your help has warded off a terrible state of things," he went on sadly. "It seems to me the old story of the sins of the parents visited upon the children. Shall I go in with you?"

Mrs. Drew shook her head and waved her old friend and counselor away as she unlatched the door and found herself in the best bedroom of the bailiff's cottage.

It was a neat little room, the floor as white as a well-scrubbed oaken floor could be. There was an old carved oak linen-press, on which stood two heavy brass candlesticks; there were a couple of chairs, and a chest of drawers, covered with a clean napkin, on which lay a huge Bible; over the mantel-piece were colored prints. The lattice window was open, and a gay jug with a bunch of flowers stood on the window-seat.

Close by was the bed; on it lay the boy with the fair face and the long golden curls, who, despite his fairness, had the expression of that handsome dark Captain Drew—the man who had once done his best to break the heart of this gentle lady.

"You?" said the boy, in a strange voice—he had risen in bed, and his large eyes were fixed upon Mrs. Drew with wild intensity—"you?" Then he sunk back upon his pillow.

"Yes, it is I," said Mrs. Drew gently. She sat down on a chair by the bed and placed her hand, chilled with emotion, on his fevered

forehead. "I will not scold you for running here, Gerald, for you are ill," she went on, with gentle motherliness. "But why did you come? Did you come to me, or to—to Mr. Rawson, the clergyman?"

The boy smiled slightly, and glanced at her with a meaning look.

"I knew he came from you," he whispered; "who else has ever troubled about us? Grandmother and grandfather? They took all poor mother's money when she was acting—yes, and sold her things besides; then, when she got so ill, there was no money at all, so everything she had went. Mother tried to keep some back, but they were like foxes after chickens—you couldn't hide a thing from them. They haven't got her a proper doctor. Then they beat us and locked us up; I fought my way out—look here!"—he showed long jagged wounds on his hands and arms. "That kind parson gentleman who found me in the field thought I had been fighting somewhere; I got these when I battered in the door-panels and got out. It went against me to leave the sisters; but, as those two old ones were pretty well stupid drunk, they wouldn't hurt them then, and there was little harm leaving them for a while. But I didn't know it was so far. I walked and I walked, and sometimes got a lift in a cart and a sleep in a barn, but the tramps and the gypsies didn't like the looks of me, I think. The tramps stole my cap and my coat, and the gypsies set their boys hooting and their dogs barking at me, and called out, 'Ah, that's what fine gentlemen come to when they run away from school!' Then I got dizzy, the road began to heave as I walked, and once or twice I tumbled over upon the grass by the ditches and seemed to go into a sort of sleep and wake up sick and cold, and wondering who I was and what I was about. Then my feet bled and got sore, and I crept into hiding when I saw any one coming. When I got to Heathside, and knew I was near the clergyman who had been so kind, it seemed to overcome me. How I got under that hedge I don't know—"

"Stop!" said Mrs. Drew, feeling sick at heart. "Don't think of it any more, Gerald, my boy. You are with friends now."

"But what about mother? Oh, you will send some one to my mother?"

"At once, dear boy," Mrs. Drew began, but Gerald stopped her.

"You won't be angry if I ask you something?" he said. "You must be some one very near to us to take such trouble. Are you my poor father's sister?"

The blood rushed to Mrs. Drew's face. It was an awful moment.

"Don't think badly of him if you are," he said, the excitement of passionate feeling stimulating him, weak though he actually was. "Oh, don't! I knew papa had quarreled with his family when he married mamma, and no one ever wrote or took any notice of him. But, if you only knew, all of you, how good, how clever he was, and how he suffered, you could not remember him unkindly now that he is dead. Then he loved mamma so—"

"Stop, Gerald!" cried Mrs. Drew, as this poisoned arrow of speech seemed to pierce her to the very quick. "I am not your dead father's sister—only a friend."

"A friend!" said the boy. "Oh, I am glad, because a friend like you," he said—looking wistfully at the woman who, child as

he was, he saw was beautiful—"is like a guardian-angel! I dreamed you were since I was here," he continued; "you were all shining, and bigger, with great wings. I felt hot, and my body ached, and my head ached, till it seemed as if it was being beaten by hammers. But the angel that was like you came and lifted me out of bed and carried me into the cool and hushed me, and I felt happy. Then I woke up here, and Mrs. Pavitt said I had had my first good sleep."

"Gerald," said Mrs. Drew earnestly, "think that always; I will try my best that it shall be true."

Then she embraced him, kissed his brow, laid him gently back on his pillow, and went out, influenced by some new ardor which was like the passion of the soul which seizes upon those that do great deeds, heroic actions—those who are, as it might be, beings beyond and above men, and who seem to hold the world up upon their patient shoulders—up nearer to Heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. RAWSON, watching the doorway somewhat anxiously as he talked to the good dame about her garden and played with the children, saw Lilian come down the little passage with a godlike mercy on her gentle face, and dreaded, for he thought to himself—

"She is going to do all or nothing. She will not leave matters alone; so it will be all. And the squire and the colonel—what will they say? And what will Felicia—my wife—say?" The latter thought brought out a mental ejaculation—"Oh, Heaven! But I must see her through, I must see her through!"

Mrs. Drew, with the sweet absent manner of one who descends to earthly trifles after the intoxication of a heavenly vision, spoke to the bailiff's wife and caressed the children, then went slowly across the field with the Rector.

Too slowly by far for him indeed! For she was insisting upon his help in a matter he did not feel inclined to meddle with. Mrs. Drew first begged him, entreated him, and, when he met the gaze of the pure pathetic eyes, it was hard to resist. Then she said, stopping short—

"If—If"—drawing a deep breath—"you do not go, Mr. Rawson, my duty lies plainly before me. This woman must be protected. If you do not go, I must."

This was a convincing blow; Mr. Rawson acquiesced. He would go, of course, he said. How indeed, he thought, could he subject Mrs. Drew to such degradation?

"Then there is another point on which I must beg your help," went on Mrs. Drew. "The dear boy—he must not, he cannot stay there; he must come to the Hall."

"What?" said the Rector, stopping short. He had expected much, but scarcely such a proposition as this. "Are you mad, Lilian? But it is impossible, utterly impossible."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Drew, speaking as firmly as Mr. Rawson himself. "Pray is not the Hall my home?"

"Scarcely yet! Would you—I was going to say—desecrate the house where your father and mother have lived in simple purity all

these long years by bringing the child of a man like Captain Drew and of that actress into it?"

"You are unjust, Mr. Rawson."

"I did not mean anything against actresses in particular. An actress can be good—ay, even better than her fellow-women who have not her temptations. I meant this—before that boy crosses the squire's threshold the squire must be told who he is."

"Have I not the right to invite my own guests? Do you deny me the right?" asked Lilian sternly.

"Not in reason! But this—this hateful case is an exceptional one, Lilian! Be sensible, be reasonable. Your first duty is not with these people; it is with your father, your mother, and Lilith. Then your cousin—the people round about! Has there not been scandal enough?"

They were nearing the Rectory gate. The colonel and the rosy-cheeked Mary were standing in the doorway looking out for them.

"I shall ask my Cousin Geoffrey's advice," said Mrs. Drew slowly and quietly.

"Pray, pray consider what you are about," entreated the Rector, in a low, earnest voice. "He is your cousin and your father's heir, I know; but until the other day he was comparatively a stranger to you. If you do ask his advice, will you abide by it?"

"Will you go to town to-night?" asked Lilian, stopping short and looking at her watch. "There are two more trains—"

"I will do all you require on this point if you will promise me to follow Colonel Ware's advice about bringing that boy to the Hall," said the Rector. Little fear, he thought, as he looked toward the soldierly form with the empty sleeve leaning against the doorpost, what that advice would be!

Lilian, who was standing gazing back at the bailiff's cottage, turned suddenly and saw Colonel Ware looking earnestly at her It was a gaze in which there were mingled interest, sadness, longing. His expression changed as their eyes met; but in her overwrought, nervous mood Mrs. Drew seemed at that moment to be pre-warned that her cousin would come to feel more strongly for her than she had dreamed of or wished.

Astonished, confused, her sensation at the unexpected revelation was one of shrinking, almost of dislike. She did not, as some vainer women might have done, jump to the conclusion that Colonel Ware had fallen head over ears in love with her at first sight. But she told herself that this look of his, as well as his somewhat puzzling manner that day, meant that, without her intending or wishing such a thing, she already had considerable influence over him.

"I can—I am sure I can talk him over," she thought. There would be the walk home; it would be less painful to tell the story of her desertion in the darkness. Her blushes of wounded pride would be hidden. "I promise," she said to the Rector.

"That's a good girl!" he said, with a sigh of relief.

He felt his responsibility somewhat shifted. Indeed, of late, while he had sent large sums from Mrs. Drew for the use of those children, he had felt as if he were scarcely doing right. Now some one else—and that some one else a military man, whose very word and

gesture showed the strict disciplinarian—would know, judge, and—please Heaven!—would direct, or rather check Mrs. Drew.

With a smile to Geoffrey—the smile a woman gives to a man who knows all her circumstances, and in whom she has perfect confidence—Mrs. Drew went back into the little parlor. Mrs. Rawson, highly gratified by the colonel's chivalrous attention to her as his hostess during their visits to the various interesting objects in the Rectory farm, was pouring out tea, assisted by her daughter Kate. As Lilian came in, she said—

"Well, my dear, your little mystery with the Rector has not kept you very long. I am sure I quite hurried the good colonel; and, after all, he did not see those two beautiful heifers in one of the houses. Why, you have scarcely been gone an hour!"

An hour! It seemed a day—days—to Mrs. Drew since she had walked through the copse and down the green slope with the colonel listening to his love-story of long ago. She was wondering, thinking, dreaming, during the cheerful tea; she smiled as they all talked and laughed, without knowing what the conversation was.

Presently the Rector went out; and, after tea was taken away, his wife followed him. Then he came back, apologized for leaving them, and announced his journey to town. His wife had been slightly annoyed when she heard of this sudden call. But part of her duty was to be agreeable to the squire and his family, so she did not show how surprised she was—put out, her daughters would have called it—in the presence of her guests.

The Rector gone, they strolled in the garden, watching the sun go down; and, when sunset came—one of those gorgeous sunsets which always made Mrs. Drew yearn for Lilith—they sat under the porch, and Mary sung little Scotch songs and ballads to them. Mary had a sweet plaintive voice. Her last song was "Willie, we have missed you." After this, Mrs. Drew rose and said good-by. She felt the sudden reaction after excitement; or was it that name—Willie—that made her think of the faded roses locked away in her drawer, of that night at the theater, when Willie Macdonald's honest, gentle gallantry during a trying scene had so impressed itself upon her mind that she could not think of Lilith, or of those children, or even of London itself, without dwelling upon his kindnesses, his genial presence, his boyish fervor?

Lilith! She longed for her next letter, due during the next day or two.

It was a soft sweet evening, the sky a pale greenish blue; the air was cool; there was a transparency that made far-off objects seem nearer. The church which they were to have explored looked dark gray from among its belt of yew-trees. The corn fields with the standing shocks of wheat were a luminous yellow. It was one of those nights when Lilith would have reveled in the new phases of color produced by a happy moment of Nature.

As Mr. Drew and her cousin the colonel—after bidding the Rector's family good night—walked up the slope homeward, Mrs. Drew paused and looked back.

"If only Lilith could see that!" she exclaimed. Then she spoke of her child. "We are so entirely different," she said; "yet we see things alike, admire alike, and our ideas of what is right and

good are the same—as far as the ideas of a middle-aged woman and a mere girl can be."

"You speak of being middle-aged," said the colonel; "yet, when I came upon you in that break in the wood, you looked a young girl in your white dress. Lilian," he went on, almost awkwardly, for he was unaccustomed to purely personal talk, "you seem years and years younger than I am."

"Because you have seen so much, traveled so far, and I"—she stopped a moment to gather courage to embark upon the subject she intended to speak to him about—"well, my life has been like one long calm day which is now sinking into evening—a calm day broken upon by a short terrible storm. I mean my marriage, Geoffrey. It—well—I—oh, to-night I must speak to you on the subject, please! I promised the Rector to do so, or nothing would induce me."

The colonel's dark face flushed, and, old as he was, his pulses beat faster. What did this mean?

"I have given you confidences I never gave to living soul before, Lilian," he said warmly, as he held open the gate of the copse for Mrs. Drew to pass in. "It is but a fair return. Surely you must know I will do my duty by you—stand by you till death if needs be? You are my kinswoman as well as"—he stopped—what was he going to say?—"as well as a claimant to the estate," he stammered. That was certainly not what he had had on the tip of his tongue, he confusedly felt.

"Oh, that inheritance! Pray let us leave that question alone," said Lilian wearily. "It has nothing to do with this. I told you my married life was a short storm; did I not? Well, it was one of those brief wild storms such as you must often have seen in hotter lands than this; it not only ruined my life, but wrecked the lives of others."

"Yes," said her cousin kindly, and in the tone which meant "continue."

"I suppose you can imagine what I mean?" said Mrs. Drew, her cheeks burning. "There were three children, and their mother was ill—disabled; they were penniless—"

"Well?" asked the colonel, astonished. "Oh, I see! These—these people have dared to blackmail you! My dear child, that question is easily settled; but it shall have nothing to do with you. We won't trouble my uncle of course; but Mr. Rawson and I will talk the matter over, and arrange so that there shall be no further annoyance."

He spoke with his determined military manner, which was new to Mrs. Drew. Just a tinge of—was it fear, embarrassment, or what checked her somewhat?

"You quite mistake me," she said gently; then she told her story, and the colonel, impatiently swinging his stick, listened.

He had heard of women shutting themselves into convents, of women sacrificing their lives for those they loved, and he had seen women cheerfully ascend the funeral pile of their dead husbands to be burnt alive with the corpse; but he had never expected to meet a woman who would plead the cause of her dead husband's mistress and children as if it were her own.

The trouble—the storm, as she called it—must have affected her

brain, he thought; and, when she had come to an end with the request that the colonel would aid and abet in the lad Gerald's introduction into Heathside Hall, at all events for the present, he congratulated himself that he was there, that he had come at the right moment. As a commander of men, he was not in the habit of consulting those under his command as to what his commands should be; and now, although he was rapidly making up his mind as to his future line of conduct, he certainly had no intention of letting his hare-brained cousin into his secrets.

"You are an angel, Lilian," he said, as they emerged into the park. "No, it is not a compliment; I never heard of a woman with such generous intentions."

He said but little more; he was on guard. By the time they reached home he had pledged himself to help Lilian as far as his honor would permit. She had tried to excite his enthusiasm without avail; he had, without seeming to do so, thrown cold water on her romantic suggestions.

"Everything that can be done in reason shall be done," he assured Mrs. Drew, as he bade her good night; and with that she had to be satisfied.

She had expected an easy victory; but the colonel had frozen or hardened freshly at each assault.

"That is a man who would never forgive," she told herself, with a new awe of him. "Yet this morning he was so different; I might have turned him round my little finger. How changeable men are!" she sighed, forgetting that a soldier on furlough is scarcely the same as a soldier on duty.

Colonel Ware stayed some days; but he remained the Colonel Ware she had consulted that night, scarcely the Cousin Geoffrey of the first part of his stay at Heathside. He visited the sick child with Mrs. Drew, and was kindly, if a trifle austere, in his manner to him. Then he called upon the Rector one morning, when his cousin thought he was about the place somewhere with her father. He briefly stated the cause of his visit to the Rector.

"I consider myself to a certain extent my Cousin Lilian's guardian," he said; "and, although I wish her to be and to do what her good heart prompts her to be and to do, I have not the slightest intention to allow her to be imposed upon or to make a fool of herself."

"I am extremely pleased to hear it, Colonel Ware," said the Rector energetically; then they discussed Lilian's position.

"It is only a temporary truce," remarked Colonel Ware, as they parted at the garden gate. "Lilian will see matters in a different light some of these days."

"Oh," said the Rector to himself, as he went indoors, "I think I fancy I can see which way the wind blows!"

"Whatever are you muttering to yourself, my dear?" asked his wife, coming suddenly upon him in her brisk busy way. "The wind? What does it matter? It seems to me due south."

"I thought so," said the Rector; then he went into his little study, and, as he refilled his ink-bottle, wondered what would come of it all.

CHAPTER XIV.

LILIAN DREW little dreamed that a crisis in her life was fast approaching to which the brief storm of short married life would be as nothing.

But the crisis really began on that day when the Rector found, in the ragged little boy lying under the hedge, the wicked Captain Drew's unfortunate son Gerald—Lilith's half-brother.

Mrs. Drew's curious ideas, which set the colonel thinking more seriously and deeply than he had thought for years, were bringing about her fate. Colonel Geoffrey Ware was in love with her. It took him some days to assure himself of the fact; but, once certain of his own feelings, he faced the future as he had faced the enemy's guns, boldly and unflinchingly.

Lilian must marry him. She required a guide, an adviser, as well as a protector for her daughter Lilith. Besides, their marriage would end all difficulty about the inheritance. The Hall would be Lilian's, as his wife; her income his, as her husband; and, when he settled his private property upon her, as he had already thought of doing, he would be settling money not only upon his cousin, but his wife.

On the evening before he left he asked Mrs. Drew to walk in the garden with him. He had been so practical, matter-of-fact—such a different Geoffrey, in fact—during these last days that Mrs. Drew acquiesced unsuspiciously, and fell into the trap without warning or preparation.

It was a warm moonlit night. Colonel Ware and Lilian paced the gravel walks, she talking nothings, he silent—so silent that at last she asked him laughingly if he had lost his tongue.

"I have something to say to you," he said bluntly; "and the truth is I don't know how to say it. You see I have not mixed in women's society—I know little about their likes and dislikes. I should like to please you, but am afraid of offending you."

"Geoffrey! As if I should be offended with you after your kindness and thoughtfulness!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "You certainly know next to nothing of women, as you say. Say on; I promise I will not be offended."

He hesitated a few moments. Then he stopped, and said—

"I want to marry you—that's all."

Mrs. Drew gasped. His lover-like looks had so entirely stopped since the evening on which she became confidential that her cousin's declaration came with the force of a blow.

"Oh, dear!" she said feebly, leaning back against a handy garden-seat. "What—when, oh, whatever can have put that idea into your head?"

"That is just what I can't tell," he answered, somewhat relieved now that the secret intention which had oppressed him during these last days at Heathside was no longer a secret. "I like to be truthful. I really think my determination to marry you came from two things. One—our position—my being heir to the land, and bent on making reparation to you for ousting you and your child. Two—

because I have felt of late that you and I ought to be more to each other, that I ought to be able to dictate."

"And I—ought to obey," said Mrs. Drew, with a slightly hysterical laugh. "Oh, Geoffrey, I wish you had not talked like this! It has made me feel myself dishonored, as it were. I cannot help it—I do not feel like a widow! I still feel a wife—don't you understand? My husband and I never had any farewells. We ceased to be together—that is all! I realize nothing but that; all the horrible tale of his new wife and his children seemed like a nightmare! His death—well, that I have hardly believed. I have not seen him ill, I have not nursed him, he did not die in my arms! I almost fancy sometimes that she is his widow, but I am still his wife—that some day we shall be together, and all will be forgiven and explained."

"Ah!" ejaculated the colonel meaningly. "Would you mind lighting my cigar for me?"—his one arm, though handy from long habit, led to his asking help more often than he wished. "Thanks," he said, as Mrs Drew struck a match and lighted the cigar he had handed to her.

Then he smoked for half a minute without speaking, while Lilian Drew felt bewildered, wretched, yearning with a vague longing for she knew not what. Just at this juncture, when another woman might have felt almost triumphant at bringing such game as this determined bachelor to her feet without indeed having shot at him, Lilian felt depressed, miserable, utterly alone.

"Lilian," said he, "you are a visionary. It won't do. You must give it up. You had better make up your mind to marry me. You shall be happy, I promise you!"

"Happy—when I cannot love you?" questioned Mrs. Drew hopelessly.

"I will love you enough for us both," said the colonel, with a smile.

"That is not the same thing—you know that!" she went on, exasperated by his slight smile, plainly visible in the white light. "Did you not tell me only the other night—day, I mean—how you loved that girl in India—how, when you saw her coming or heard her voice or her footstep, or detected the perfumes she used, your knees trembled under you, you turned giddy, your heart seemed a dead weight in your chest? That was love, if you like—this is not. I am not such a simpleton as to think it. You mistake your feelings toward me, Geoffrey," she went on bitterly. "You pity me—you want to be generous—that is all."

"And you are ungenerous, without meaning to be," returned the colonel. "When that affair happened that I told you about, she was a girl, I a mere boy. It was a young man's passion—that was all. Love is a very different thing—love is unselfish. Then you and I are middle-aged. You cannot have the feelings of a young girl—you, who are mother, and have been wife—any more than I can have the feelings of a young fellow who would lie awake at night and write verses and lie at your feet staring at you by the hour together—a fellow who would make a fool of himself before marriage, but would not be aware of it till afterward, when the shock would be something like a header into ice water."

"I do not agree with you," said Lilian, coldly, offended by the

colonel's coolness and self-possession as much as by his speech. "Love is unselfish—well and good; but it is not cold. It just shows itself as you say. If it is not that sort of human idolatry at first, how can it stand the wear and tear of married life, with its cares and troubles?"

"Oh, I understood you to say that you never loved Captain Drew in that way—that you were glad when he went out; you preferred the society of your lady friends!"

"That has nothing to do with the question," declared Mrs. Drew, the blood rushing to her cheeks and ears. "I did not love my husband in that way; and it was just the knowledge of this which made me feel as if I were partly responsible for his loving another woman."

"You have not loved your husband," said the colonel, gravely throwing away his cigar, "and you do not love me? Who is it then—who is the happy man who has made you feel as I am almost amused at having felt when I was an unfledged lout?"

"No one!" cried Lilian impetuously. "I wonder you dare ask such a thing! I, a married woman, too! But I have read Byron, then Shakespeare's love-scenes, and Shelley."

"I don't think even women moon over poetry unless they have been or are in love," said the colonel innocently. "However, of course I know nothing about it."

"You are right" returned Mrs. Drew, turning round sharply and beginning to walk toward the house.

The colonel joined her, and they followed the path in silence. The colonel was perfectly satisfied. This was no passionless, immovable abstraction in the shape of a woman! The quiet Mrs. Drew had shown not only wounded vanity, but anger and jealousy during this short interview, while her emotions had been stirred. "I can make her love me with a doglike love," he told himself. "She shall not be my slave; but I bet that a year hence no one will be able to say with truth what they are so fond of saying about some newly-married couples—'the love is all on one side.'"

While he was thinking thus, Lilian Drew, in her annoyance, pique, and perturbation, almost disliked him.

They were on the terrace.

"Lilian," called Mrs. Ware from within the lighted drawing-room, "have you your little shawl, my dear? Remember the dew, and your thin muslin."

"Your dress may be damp; you had better go in at once," said the colonel, touching her shoulder lightly with his one hand. "I suppose you would like to say 'No' to me before I go. Well, I do not intend to give you the opportunity. I would not accept any answer to-night, as I have taken you by surprise; and early to-morrow I shall be off to town, and the night-mail will carry me far away before midnight. I shall travel for a month; then I shall come here for your answer. Meanwhile—Heaven bless you and your child—and the dear old folk!"

Then he stepped into the drawing-room, said good-night and good-by to his aunt, and went off to the squire in the smoking-room.

"I am very sorry the dear boy is going," said Mrs. Ware, quite affected by the stalwart colonel's affectionate farewell. "Ah, Lilian, things do go cross in this world! I can't help thinking sometimes

how different everything would have been if you and Geoffrey had come together, instead of your being thrown away as you were."

Lilian treated her mother's speech lightly, as if it were a joke. Then she took up a book; her eyes followed the words, the lines. She turned over the pages; but she had not the remotest notion of what she was seemingly so studiously reading.

She was thinking; and her thoughts were scarcely ordinary or in any way like her usual gentle thoughts. She was thinking that, instead of refusing the colonel, it would "serve him right" if she were to marry him and make him hotly, desperately and madly in love with her.

"How I should be revenged for this talk to-night," she said to herself, "if I could turn round some day and remind him that such love was only for foolish boys, and not befitting sober middle-aged folks such as he and I!"

It was a reflection quite unworthy of her; but for that one thought she was to be punished, if suffering be a punishment for evil thoughts.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. DREW awoke in the night, thought of her peculiar position, said to herself that the colonel was a brute—only wanted to marry her to simplify matters and to play the benefactor—and solved her difficulties by crying herself to sleep. When Mary entered quietly the next morning and opened the shutters, the light hurt her eyes; so she knew she had the beginning of a bad headache, and asked for her breakfast to be brought upstairs. When it came, a letter from Lilith was on the tray—a short note.

"Oh, dearest mother, I am—we all are in such trouble! Willie has had an accident to his head; he is still insensible; and it was my fault. If you could only come! Mrs. Law is dreadfully angry with me, and I do not wonder; but I do not care for that. Aunt Macdonald says nothing, and is wonderfully patient; but she looks so white, and as wretched as if she believed Willie would die. Oh, do come if you possibly can to your unhappy LILITH!"

Mrs. Drew read it twice; then she quietly pushed aside her breakfast-tray, and slid out of bed. Presently, when Mary came in to see after her mistress, she found her dressed and arranging her bonnet as she stood before her cheval-glass.

"I am going to town, Mary," she said; "I may be back to-night, or I may not."

"To town, ma'am! And pouring with rain as it is, and you looking so ill? Dear—dear!"

"I may bring back Miss Lilith perhaps," continued her mistress, in an absent way, her thoughts absorbed by the news just received. She was ghastly white, and, in spite of the close sultry morning, shivered as she went down-stairs—first into her mother's bedroom to explain.

She read Lilith's letter to Madam Ware, who was having her cap pinned on, and was relieved to find that her mother understood her

wish to answer the appeal in person. Then she ordered the carriage, gave housekeeping directions, caught the early train, and in a few hours was knocking at the door of the old house in Prince's Square.

The butler insisted upon taking her into the dining room, where Mrs. Law sat sternly in state to rebuke all who approached her.

She received Mrs. Drew as if she were a culprit, just touching the tips of her fingers.

"The sad importance of this unfortunate accident cannot be overrated," she said gloomily. "William Macdonald is our heir. He will inherit the estate in Hampshire, now let to Sir Francis Booth for a term of years; and this house will be his also. Until now he has been Mr. Law's sole interest in life. Indeed, but for William, I believe Mr. Law would have insisted upon returning to India, and would therefore have been dead ere now, for no man with only a morsel of liver left as big as my thumb-nail could live many days in India—that every one knows. And all this—this hitherto most desirable state of things," went on Mrs. Law irrelevantly, after a short pause to take breath, "has been brought to an end by your daughter's carelessness. Of all the flighty, self-willed, ungovernable—"

Here the door opened and Lilith flew into the room. Once more mother and child were in each other's arms. Mrs. Drew felt her daughter's heart beating fiercely against her bosom; but when they drew apart she saw that Lilith looked composed. There was some change in her. She wore one of her girlish dresses; but she looked a woman. She would have been thought eighteen or nineteen. Her hair was gathered back and fell in a long plait to her waist. Though there was a look of anguish in the large eyes with the blue circle that told of sleepless anxiety, there was no wildness. Lilith was tamed!

"Have you heard? Has Mrs. Law told you?" she asked.

"I am too unnerved to repeat the story," said Willie's aunt pettishly. "You had better take your poor mother up-stairs—indeed I shall be unfit for anything if you do not keep out of my sight."

Lilith took her mother to the drawing-room, and related that Willie was taking her for a walk one evening, when her foot slipped, and she fell, crossing a road. A carriage came dashing round the corner, and, in trying to snatch her from under the rearing horses, suddenly checked by the coachman, Willie was knocked down.

"One of the horses kicked him," she said. "How awful it was! Some men and I took him to a hospital close by; then Mrs. Law came in the carriage with her own doctor, and brought him home. It was two days ago. I could not write yesterday—I felt too dreadful; but they say he may live now, although he is still unconscious."

Mrs. Drew soothed and comforted Lilith. She was, as it were, steadied by this unexpected trouble. Yesterday and the colonel seemed a feverish dream. She made Lilith lie down; then she took off her bonnet, and, going to the door of the sick-room, knocked. Mrs. Macdonald came to the door, and, seeing who it was, joined Mrs. Drew in the passage.

"I am glad you have come," she said, "for poor Lilith's sake." Then she exonerated Lilith from all blame.

"I shall take her home," announced Mrs. Drew.

"Perhaps it would be as well," said Willie's mother. "You see,

it would not do quite to let her help to nurse him, although she is ready and willing to do it, poor child. The fact is, Mrs. Law thinks her too old. She says the neighbors have talked about their being so much together, as it is. That is nonsense, between you and me," she added. Then she asked Mrs. Drew if she would like to see Willie.

Mrs. Drew shrunk a little, but said "Yes." Mrs. Macdonald opened the door. It was a simple room, hung with engravings. Over the mantelpiece was a pencil-drawing—to Mrs. Drew's astonishment, a portrait of herself, with flowing hair and a crown. No one, perhaps, would have recognized that it was intended as a portrait. But she well remembered Lilith's sketching her one day as Mary was brushing her long hair. The crown had been added since.

She looked away, slightly startled at such a curious incident—away to the other side of the room, where there was an iron bedstead, beside which sat a nurse, who rose as she and Mrs. Macdonald approached the bed.

"Sit down," said Willie's mother, gently pushing Mrs. Drew into the vacant chair. "He will not know, or take notice. He only moans at noises—sometimes."

Willie's face was turned away on the pillow—his head was bandaged; but his breathing was soft and slow.

"I believe that he will get well, that he is better," said Mrs. Drew confidently to the mother and nurse.

Then she went to Lilith, who was leaning in dumb despair against the painting-room window. Since the night when William Macdonald promised Mrs. Drew to protect and care for Lilith, he had gradually made himself indispensable to the girl. While living his own working life, he had actually lived for her. It all seemed so plain to Lilith now as she looked out at the black gardens—the dying leaves dropping with the steady rain and the clouds of smoke borne downward making a dismal picture. She had been exacting too, and on one or two occasions, when he was unpunctual, had been almost disagreeable in her manner to him, who was always cheerfully kind. When her mother came in and said, "He is better; I feel sure he will live," she burst into a fit of sobbing; but this broke the ice, and she spent the next half-hour in passionate eulogium—extravagant, even for Lilith.

"This is that calf-love Colonel Geoffrey sneered at," thought her mother; "and he of course loves her." She sighed—sighed as one disabled by age may sigh, watching the gambols of young creatures in the exuberance of youth's grace and freedom.

She was loath to grieve her child; but, when Lilith spoke of the time when she should be allowed to see the patient, she at once told her that she would return home that night.

Lilith begged and entreated; she coaxed, argued, even fell at her mother's knees and embraced them; but this made Mrs. Drew still firmer in her determination—only she softened matters by suggesting that, when William Macdonald was better, he should come to Heathside for change of air.

After this had been proposed to Mrs. Macdonald, who seemed pleased at the idea, Lilith took leave of old Mr. Law, who looked disconsolate at the loss of his playfellow, which Lilith had managed

to be whenever she could—which meant when the harsh house-mistress was out of the way. He patted her head, blessed her, and told her he hoped she would come back soon—a kind good-by from the helpless old gentleman, which was counteracted by his wife's stern dismissal of her young guest.

This was in the privacy of Mrs. Law's gaunt forbidding-looking bed-chamber, which, hung with dark green moreen and clothed in carpet and furniture of a hideous sage tint, was Lilith's horror. Mrs. Law sat down with hands folded on her lap, and harangued. This parting oration would have served capitally as a dry lecture on duty. Lilith wriggled and twisted as she stood inwardly counting the number of times that word—never a favorite of hers—occurred in the lady's speech, when suddenly—her feelings had a habit of rising to the surface with a rush—she impatiently said—

"Why do you talk about duty? Have I not worked and worked at things I hated? Isn't that doing my duty?"

"That is merely preliminary," answered Mrs. Law. "You have idled away your own good time, and my nephew's still more precious time, by these ridiculous walks, when you might have been reading some instructive book, and be assisting me with my truly heavy work of keeping Mr. Law amused. You ought to have—"

Here she gave a little start of surprise. Lilith suddenly said, "Good-by, Mrs. Law, and thank you for everything," and flew out of the room.

"I have done for myself now," she told her mother, who was waiting for her below—the carriage was at the door. "No; I cannot apologize—there is no time—we shall miss the train."

Ah, she was yet untamed, still unstable, thought her mother. Still, as they journeyed home, Lilith's high spirits, her amusing descriptions of the drawing-school, her monkey-like imitations of the students, fascinated her mother. But Mrs. Drew found herself wondering how it was that this young Macdonald had come to admire Lilith, as his late devotion to her proved he must have done. She had her fascination, this lithe brown creature; but it was the fascination of originality and passion. There seemed so little that was feminine, tender in her; and of beauty she had not a scrap.

"There is no accounting for tastes," thought Mrs. Drew.

Then she asked Lilith how it was that she did not wish to return to Mrs. Law's. How was it that she was content to leave this favorite friend?

"I have never heard you sneer before," answered Lilith, suddenly grave and reproachful, looking full at her mother with her big dark eyes. "Favorite friend. Well, he is my favorite friend! He ought to be! But I know him well enough to be certain that, if he wants to see me, nothing will prevent him. He may look boyish; but he has a man's pluck and nerve, or I should never have cared for him as I do."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Drew, with slight uneasiness—she was not anxious for a second rhapsody that day—"but these are scarcely the days of knights taking to horse and riding in search of the ladies they admire. There are so many of us now. We have limited spheres of action. We must elbow our way through the crowd, or we knock against some one who may return the knock with a venge-

ance, even to throwing us to the ground to be trampled by the struggling crowd. No, my dear child! I had hoped you had learned to give way."

"But, mother, you don't understand! Willie means soon to have a town house of his own, and he was to build a studio for me. Whenever he was silent, he told me he was planning the future."

"I suppose he thought I should allow you to go and live with him and Mrs. Macdonald!" said Mrs. Drew, with a curious laugh. "Charming—delightful castles in the air! Ah, my dear, Cousin Geoffrey will be the one to manage you with his sober common sense!"

"I hate Cousin Geoffrey—at least, the man you described in your letters! How could I like any one that is going to supplant us—to take away our home?"

"He does not intend to do so," said Mrs. Drew; but she changed the conversation—a slight flush rose to her cheek. "I am tired, dear," she said—once more the gentle, almost pleading mother that had seemed somewhat different to Lilith during these last hours. "It is tiring to talk while this rattle and roar goes on."

Lilith subsided obediently into her corner of the compartment which they happened to have to themselves; and she watched for choice bits of field and fell, woodland and river. The rain had stopped. The soft haze lying on the landscape was tinted by the pale rays of the misty sun.

Mrs. Drew lay back wearily, her head—she had removed her bonnet—supported by the blue padding of the railway-carriage. She dreamed; she did not sleep; her dreams were day-dreams. She went through probabilities and possibilities. She thought of Lilith and Willie being married. She imagined them before the altar, hand in hand. The idea was singularly distasteful to her. It was almost irritating. Then she thought of her Cousin Geoffrey and herself. That idea was nauseous—almost horrible!

"I shall be prepared with my answer when he comes back, little fear of that!" she assured herself. "I shall enjoy saying 'No.' It will be one of the pleasantest moments in my life."

CHAPTER XVI.

It was a calm August evening. The harvest was over; the last roses were half hidden by the dying leaves. The hall windows glittered golden red in the sunset. This was the day that Willie Macdonald was to come to Heathside Hall "to be nursed," as Mrs. Drew worded it. A fortnight before she had longed to have the forlorn little lad, her husband's only son Gerald, to lavish her tenderness upon; but Colonel Ware and Mr. Rawson had taken the affair of the actress and her family completely out of Lilian's hands. Mrs. Drew was not consulted; she was told what had been done.

And the ways of those two worldly-wise men were not as her impulsive and somewhat eccentric ways. Gerald was sent away to the seaside to be day-boarder at a school where he was afterward to be educated—instead of going to Eton and costing Mrs. Drew the greater part of her income, as she had intended. The mother was

removed from the house of her drunken parents to a home where she would be nursed back into health, should such a thing be possible; and the little girls were placed in the family of a struggling clergyman, whose wife would give them maternal care. It was almost satisfactorily arranged. Still Mrs. Drew sighed whenever she thought of the children. She had proposed that they should correspond with her, a suggestion which was sharply negatived by the Rector.

"'Do you wish the unfortunate children to learn the truth about themselves, or do you wish them to think that men may openly transgress God's law and man's law, and rather benefit by it than otherwise?" Mr. Rawson had asked her, far more sternly than Lilian had as yet heard him speak.

"That is a hard saying," she had replied reproachfully, for she was nettled.

However, it had the effect of silencing her. Whatever she might do when the children were grown up, she felt she was not to be allowed to adopt them now, as she had vaguely dreamed of doing.

So she had fallen back upon Lilith. Lilith was fuller of life and energy than ever. She had returned determined to waste no fraction of her precious time.

"When I first grasped how much I had to do, what close drudgery I must go through before I could dare to call myself a painter, I was frightened," she had told her mother.

"For the first time in your life, I expect," Mrs. Drew had replied, with a smile.

"Anyhow, for the last," Lilith had said, with a determintion wich her mother wondered at.

Yes, Lilith was changed. The old spirit was there, but in harness; and a new calm but resolute will made the gentle mother almost afraid of her daughter at certain moments.

"When Willie Macdonald comes, I shall see how he manages her," she thought; and she looked forward eagerly to the time when Willie would be well enough to undertake the journey to Heathside.

Meanwhile she had been happy with Lilith, although slightly fatigued by exertions which seemed no exertion to the tall lithe girl. Lilith was up and out early to paint the various sunrise effects, and would come and wake her mother in the gray dawn when the birds were twittering. Mrs. Drew meekly arose, and accompanied her child; but, while Lilith dashed off bold sketches of extraordinary combinations of color by the half-dozen, Mrs. Drew's efforts to catch a fleeting sky-effect and stamp it on her canvas led to nothing but a strange medley of red, green, and yellow streaks, which might have been the portrait of anything motley, from a rainbow to a distant mass of flower beds. Lilith shook her head at Mrs. Drew's attempts, and—not without a comforting idea of warm naps in her darkened bed-chamber instead of cold morning air on a bleak hill-side—her mother gave up sunrises. But, after her housekeeping was over for the morning, she would drive Lilith and her easel and painting paraphernalia to some choice spot which Lilith was making a picture of; she would paint a little also, or work and talk, or wander idly, dreaming of her life, past, present, and to come. This life of hers would always be the same, she thought, except that new interests

loomed in the distance. Lilith's children, perhaps, and, some time in the future, Gerald and his sisters, were matters to be looked forward to. Mrs. Drew would thrill with a certain ecstatic sensation as she fancied some fair little head nestling against her breast, some warm little creature that belonged to her, depended upon her, held close in her arms.

A rare and sweet smile would rest upon her beautiful face while these fancies hovered about her mind.

One day Lilith, flashing her quick eyes upon her mother as she squeezed fresh paint upon her palette, asked her what she was thinking of.

"I was thinking how delightful it must be to be a grandmother," said Mrs. Drew, with a little laugh and a blush.

Lilith looked her up and down with a grave curious expression. The girl's mind was already more matured than her mother's. In many ways she saw further, she grasped truths more quickly.

"You don't look much like a grandmother," she said dryly, as she recommenced her painting. "If you are so fond of children, mother, why don't you marry again?"

Mrs. Drew flushed crimson.

"Lilith!" she cried, as if her daughter had done her some bodily hurt.

Lilith, repentant, dropped her brush and was full of regretful apology.

"I ought to have known better, to have known that you would never do that!" she assured her mother—a speech which was almost as distasteful to Mrs. Drew as the last. It was the one disappointing day of the whole fifteen that mother and child were *tête-à tête*.

To-day Willie was to arrive, shortly before dinner. Neither Mrs. Drew nor Lilith had altered her daily programme. They had been out; Lilith had put the finishing touches to a landscape. Mrs. Drew, arranging her hair before her glass about six o'clock, saw Lilith, already dressed, sauntering into the garden.

"Where are young going?" she cried, hurrying to the window. "The train will be in soon; he will be here in less than half an hour."

"I am going to fetch a book I left in the wigwam," said Lilith coolly: and then she went slowly down the terrace-steps.

Mrs. Drew stared for a moment in surprise; then she returned to her dressing-table.

"Strange child!" she thought, puzzled. "She adores him—I am certain of it; yet, when he is expected, she gets out of the way. Is she afraid of betraying herself? It must be that—it can be nothing else!"

She went down-stairs wondering. Her kind little mother was already in the drawing-room. As Lilian joined her, she asked the aid of her arm.

"I must be in the hall, to welcome the poor lad, Lilian my dear," she said, as she walked slowly out of the room, and into the hall, where she sat down on an old oaken porter's-chair. "He will feel lonely, strange—poor young man—tired from his journey." And there she sat, patiently waiting, while Mrs. Drew, feeling restless and worried—she could not think why—went out and listened.

There was no sound but a distant whistle from the railway. How calm and beautiful the park looked, with its fair green slopes, with the big trees still, as if slumbering, their stately tops gilded by the last sun-rays! What peace this must seem to a weary invalid after the heat, smoke, and noise of a great city!

Mrs. Drew held her hand upon her side; her heart was beating fiercely, yet she had heard only the sound of far-off carriage wheels. "How stupid!" she thought, in annoyance. "I must be out of health to be so nervous."

But, as she strained her eyes to catch the first glimpse of the brougham sent to bring Willie Macdonald from the station, she forgot about her nervous heart-beating. She felt a sudden fear lest the carriage should drive up empty—lest Willie should be worse—perhaps—who could tell?—dead. Dead—and through Lilith? Perhaps Lilith had feared this, and had gone away into the garden to hide her suspense. Fear chilled Mrs. Drew as she stood in the pale evening light. Her eyes grew dim; and could hardly realize that this was the carriage turning the corner and driving toward her.

Willie, lying back on the cushions that had been packed into the brougham by Mrs. Drew and her maid Mary, was languidly luxuriating in the quiet rural beauty, filled with delightful anticipation. He felt cruelly worn, ill, exhausted, yet he smiled.

"It would be good to die here," he was thinking, as they came in sight of the gray mansion, and he saw Mrs. Drew watching on the steps. "The angel of gentleness and mercy!" he thought, as the carriage door opened and Mrs. Drew smiled upon him.

It seemed too good to be true to the dazed invalid as the delicate lady assisted a man-servant to bring him into this new haven of rest, talking gently and encouragingly of how soon he would laugh at such aids and disdain his nurses.

"You have two, sir. Allow me to introduce you to the head-nurse," said Lilian Drew cheerfully, although her heart had ached at the sight of the wreck of Willie Macdonald as he painfully worked his way up the steps. "The head-nurse is very kind, but very firm," she went on; then Willie found his hands clasped by little Madam Ware, who grew quite animated with active sympathy at the sight of such a thin hollow-cheeked creature, whose blue eyes looked ghastly, gazing out of so wan and white a face.

"You must go to bed at once, like a good young man," said Madam Ware decidedly. "He is quite feverish, my dear." So Willie, too weak and too content to resist, found himself led off to a bedroom and quickly disposed of by the squire's own "man."

There, after a kind-faced staid woman had brought him refreshment and darkened the room, he fell asleep. It was perhaps the loveliest sleep of his life. His few troubles and annoyances of the past seemed dead, they did not rise again to trouble him. He forgot his poor old uncle, his irascible Aunt Judith, his weakly mother, his London life before Lilith came, and since. He felt transplanted into a place of repose, amid the greenness and bloom of nature; and he felt as if the greatest longing of his life were there realized, although he was still almost ignorant of what the longing was, or what indeed was its object.

His dreams were lingering about him as he awoke in the early

morning. A ray of pale gold came through the opening in the shutters. He was in a huge bedstead draped with flowery chintz: at its foot was a sofa. Raising himself on his arm, he saw his male attendant stretched asleep upon the chintz-covered couch; beyond was a writing-table: on either side of the writing-materials were vases containing clusters of white roses.

His weakened heart gave a leap. White roses! Who had decked his room with these reminiscences of that eventful night when, by his innocent connivance, the lovely woman who had worn his gift of just such flowers had to suffer so much with such gentle bravery? Could it be Mrs. Drew herself? Oh, no, impossible! The blood rushed to his pale cheek. The excitement of the thought made him feel stronger than since his accident; he coughed loudly, awakened the man-servant, and insisted upon getting up.

At first the man resisted; but the invalid was so determined that, when Mrs. Drew was talking to her mother, as she made the tea, about their invalid guest, the invalid guest walked in to answer for himself.

There were feminine chidings and threatenings and forebodings; then the nurses reluctantly allowed their patient to have his way.

Willie had not yet seen the squire; he had heard of his jollity, his kind heart, so often belied by his rough speech, of his childish "tantrums," as Madam Ware called her husband's noisy but harmless fits of ill-temper, and had been amused at Lilith's anecdotes of her grandfather. He had made a mental picture of Squire Ware; and, as the burly form surmounted by the fine old head and kindly ruddy face loomed in the high oaken doorway of the Hall dining-room, it was as if his idea was absolutely realized.

"So this is our faded flower!" said the squire, with a chuckle, first laying his hand on Willie's shoulder, then giving one of his thin white hands a warm kindly grasp. "No, no, lad; don't stir or stand on any ceremonies here. 'Tis Liberty Hall, ye know. What have these wenches given ye to straighten your back? Bah!" he went on, sniffing contemptuously as he went to the sideboard and began sharpening a carving-knife. "Eggs! Of all things, b'iled eggs! Good enough for chickens just out of the shell! Don't let them kill you with their kindness— What's your name? Oh, Macdonald! Eggs? Lump-sugar and groundsel next! Here—there's a plate of beef—that'll make a new man of you," he went on, cutting away at a huge round of cold beef on the sideboard—"and a mug of home-brewed," he added, after he had piled a plate with big slices of meat, frothing ale into a silver tankard from out his pet jug—a huge brown mug shaped like a head and face. Then he walked round and gravely deposited plate and mug by Willie.

Amidst the argument that followed Lilith came in and greeted Willie as quietly as if this had been the breakfast-table in Prince's Square, with severe Mrs. Law at its head instead of her mother. Then she sat down in her place, which was next Willie's, and remained pale and silent for a while. She had suffered intensely on the preceding day, dreading to see a change in her bright-faced friend—a change of which she had been the innocent cause; she suffered still more when she realized the effect of the accident. Willie Macdonald was not only thin and white-faced; there were the lines marked

around his eyes by brain mischief. He stooped; each movement was languid and heavy, instead of brisk and buoyant. Little wonder that Lilith felt hopelessly wretched!

She got away from the breakfast-table as soon as she could, and went wandering aimlessly into the shrubbery. The pleasant working time—pleasant in spite of its struggles and disappointments—when Willie's companionship had been her happiness, Willie's consolation and his way of making fun of her difficulties her great help in patiently enduring her life at the drawing-school, seemed ages ago.

"Never to come again," she said to herself—"never again!"

There was more than regret in her miserable mood; she was weighed down by some evil presentiment. She had nerved herself to meet her "hero"—as her mother, once lapsing into a less sweet humor than usual, had called Willie—but, as their eyes had met, some sensation of "it is all over" had made her heart heavy.

Why did she feel that "all was over"? she asked herself, as she threw herself upon the grass on a little knoll in the shrubbery, and, leaning on her elbows, unconsciously watched the tiny weeds, the insects creeping through the grass, the dead leaves as they fluttered slowly down and fell noiselessly upon the turf. What was the "all"—and why over? Would Willie die? Mrs. Macdonald had written nothing of any danger to life. She had only written that the medical authorities said that his brain had been severely shaken, and that all work must be rigidly put aside for a while. That did not mean that "all was over." She began to ponder; she thought of the first days when she had almost hated the house in Prince's Square, Mrs. Law, the drawing-school, her fellow-pupils, Miss Levell, all but the poor little old gentleman Mr. Law—who was so domineered over by his wife—and Willie and his mother. Willie stood out from the dark background in her memory as some grand picture might hang in a desolate barn. Then, later, she had not only felt that joyous happy feeling at the sight of him morning and evening; the feeling began to last. Willie seemed with her somehow all through the drudgery of straight lines, curves, and the copying of little cones and balls from the round. He had seemed with her, too, through this fortnight of violent painting. It was only when the day of his arival came near that she began to be afraid, uneasy. And now fear, uneasiness, had become a grievous melancholy, actual hopelessness.

How long she had lain pondering—the leaves dropping upon her as if she were a babe in the wood, and the redbreasts busy in the branches above—she did not know: but she was roused by distant voices, and a laugh she knew to be her mother's.

The knoll was a hundred yards or so from the Hall. Rising, she looked over the shrubbery fence, and saw a group about the steps leading to the hall door. A groom was at the head of Madam Ware's little pony-chair, in which she took airings, when not so well as usual. Mrs. Drew, in a large hat, was arranging pillows; Mary and a man-servant were assisting the invalid down the steps. Lilith stood still, watching. She watched the three settle Willie in his invalid cariage. She noted the tender way in which her mother wrapped one of her Indian shawls—one she preferred too—about his

knees; she even saw, or fancied she saw, his grateful smile. Then the pony-chair came slowly toward her, along the carriage-road. It came near. Mrs. Drew was shading the invalid with a large white umbrella. Lilith could hear her mother's voice, talking with wonderful animation for her, but she could not see her face. She saw Willie's. His eyes were gazing up toward his new nurse with an expression she had never seen there; she felt a sudden pang, a sudden enlightenment.

"That look means admiration," she thought bitterly. "And I—I could never, never inspire that."

At that moment the pony-chair passed, and Willie caught sight of Lilith.

"There is Lilith!" he said to Mrs. Drew, flushing as if ashamed.

He had certainly forgotten his girl-friend while watching the varying expressions of her mother's face. Mrs. Drew was pleasantly excited; she was in her element, tending and caring with the affectionate solicitude which with her replaced the "love" of ordinary women. Lilith thought so, as her mother looked up and asked her if she would come with them.

"Never mind your hat," she added, as Lilith pointed to a torn straw she had a peculiar affection for. "We will not go beyond the park gates."

But Lilith fancied she saw a shade on Willie's face.

"I would rather not," she cried brusquely and, running down the knoll on the other side, disappeared.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Willie, annoyed He thought Lilith unkind. Not that he particularly wanted her flying and darting about the other side of the little carriage, as he imagined she would fly and dart in the absolute liberty of her grandfather's park; but he had tried to be so much te her, he felt her manner to be disappointing.

"Oh, Lilith has been anxious, and, now that her anxiety about you is nearly over, the reaction has brought one of her queer humors!" said Mrs. Drew sweetly. Then she spoke of her child's constant gratitude to him for having taken such an active part in her life.

"Did I not promise?" asked the young man. "It has been a little hard sometimes, Mrs. Drew, I can assure you. Oh, do not think I am complaining of Lilith!" he added eagerly. "She is a genius, perhaps a very great genius. Oh, she is so unlike you, so extraordinarily unlike you!"

"I am certainly no genius," said Mrs. Drew, amused and pleased, she knew not why. "I think, if a fair example of mediocrity pure and simple were wanted, they might safely come to me. It has been in my way," she added, thinking of her freedom from the wild impulses that she had seen, first in her husband, now in Lilith. "Perhaps, if I had been able to share these moods people seem to have—to take part, as one may say, in the active lives of others—I should have been a happier woman."

"You told me—you were so good as to tell me—so much about yourself," began Willie earnestly, though lowering his voice, lest the groom who was walking a short distance ahead might hear, "that you will forgive me for asking you if you are not happy?

You ought to be. I shall never forget what an example of goodness, mercy, self-possession, you showed yourself that night! I was reminded of it—if I needed to be—this morning. Some one had put white roses on my table."

"Ah," said Mrs. Drew, smiling, "perhaps some fairy brought those dead ones of yours—I have them still—to life again."

Willie gave a slight start, but recovered himself immediately, and hastily changed the subject.

"About rages and 'moods,' as you call them," he said—"surely you, of all persons, do not admire impulse, passion, all the human feeling which has its root in self?"

"I scarcely know," answered Mrs. Drew thoughtfully. "I have never asked myself, I think. Perhaps I do; perhaps I have the sort of wonder at these natures so different from mine that one has for the magnificent in nature—mountains, thunder-storms, raging winds, boiling seas."

"You have not told me—if you are happy," said Willie.

"At this moment?" She paused and looked round. "Well, to-day I feel strangely light-hearted. The sun seems brighter, the air sweet, exhilarating. Oh, life is very beautiful!" she said suddenly, looking Willie straight in the face, with an innocent surprise. "I wonder—I do believe I am a person of moods, after all!" she added, with a laugh. 'I have longed so for some one to take care of. Lilith doesn't want it. I believe I was born to be a nurse." Then she told him the tale of poor little Gerald, found under the hedge by Willie's uncle, Mr. Rawson.

"You mentioned a cousin—the colonel—who is he?" asked Willie, after sympathizing with her on the subject of the "exiled children," as she considered them.

"The heir—our successor here," said Mrs. Drew; but she spoke with slight embarrassment, which did not escape the notice of the convalescent. "A middle-aged Indian officer, very nice in his way, is my cousin Geoffrey." Then she related about the afternoon spent at the Rectory. "He was so delighted with the house, the dairies, with everything," she added—"especially with one of your cousins her singing, I mean. You can imagine what a delightful place a peaceful English homestead like Mr. Rawson's must seem to a dried-up old Indian."

"This—this place must have pleased him still more, I should think," remarked the young man. He had never cared much for the Rawson family, he told Mrs. Drew. His cousins he considered commonplace, and, as for their mother, "She is more of a Pharisee even than Aunt Judith," he said. "My uncle, too, is an average English parson."

"Hush! You must not say that; he is my best friend," replied Mrs. Drew, with gentle chiding. "Now, remember, we always allow a certain amount of crossness to people who are getting well; but it is the nurse's duty to see that the crossness does not go too far." Then she read him a sweet lecture, which he listened to as he would have dreamily listened to the song of some favorite bird.

"You will dictate, and I shall obey," he said, when she had concluded.

How curious! This speech was the very opposite of that the

colonel had uttered in his harsh masculine voice! "I was intended to be with the young or the old, not with the middle-aged," thought Mrs. Drew, with a little sigh.

This little excursion, this placid interchange of confidences was the prelude to many such. Willie had been ordered to be out in the air as much as possible without fatigue. The three ladies took him drives in the landau. Mr. Rawson drove him leisurely through the lanes in his daughter's little pony-cariage. But Willie did not care for these excursions, although he was grateful to all and each for their kind efforts on his behalf. The drives were, as he told himself, a "come-down" after that first morning alone with Mrs. Drew.

"There is not the slightest doubt that to be alone with a congenial sympathetic being such as she is, is the highest happiness man can know," he thought. He grudged every moment that she was occupied with others. He felt irritated when Lilith took part in their talk. He had often to remember that Madam Ware, who would converse in spite of her deafness, was Lilian Drew's mother, and that Lilith, who was or seemed morose and given to sarcastic sayings, was Lilian Drew's daughter, or he would have shown his impatience with them. The young fellow was spoiled. He attributed his new-born selfishness to the irritability of convalescence, for he knew right well that he was growing less manly, less worthy, each day and hour. At this point he did not dream that he was the prey of a passion—a passion as unreasoning and violent as ever seized upon mortal man.

CHAPTER XVII.

YES, Willie Macdonald was in love. But he little dreamed that others had begun, if not to suspect, to wonder what was wrong with him. The squire had not known him previously, so merely thought sometimes, with a compassionate shake of the head, that the lad's noddle had had a worse smash than the womenfolk thought; but—kind soul—he was not going to be the one to tell them so. Besides, when Willie and the squire were together, sometimes for a slow stroll round the farm, generally for an after-dinner smoke in the squire's room, the "womenfolk" were not there, and the young man was at his best. Meanwhile Madam Ware began to draw conclusions from Mrs. Drew's light-heartedness, Willie's manner, and Lilith's dismal monotony. She was a little anxious, poor lady. These two, her daughter and grandchild, were the apples of her eyes. They made up the beauty of her life. They were to her like the special variety of some plant to the gardener who had evolved it, like the newly-discovered planet to the astronomer. Nothing that could happen to Lilian or Lilith was trifling to her. She lay awake patiently night after night, with the squire snoring the contented snore of the just at her side, counting the round white spots cast upon the darkened ceiling by the rushlight shade, and wondering how it would end.

"Not that I've anything against the poor lad," she said to herself. "But that poor dear child Lilith, baby in years as she is, is mad after him, and he's as mad after her mother. It's all nonsense, of course. But I've seen the harm of such nonsense time after time,

till I've come to think it isn't quite such harmless silliness as other folk do. Ah, I fear me no good'll come of this; and the sooner the young man takes himself off the better it'll be for all parties concerned!"

As for Lilith, her life was almost that of a toad under a harrow. She could not bring herself to find out what she thought, or feared, or felt. At last came a day when she was wound up to the pitch of action.

She had slept badly, and, getting up early, went into the garden. It was a fresh sweet morning, albeit autumnal. The shrubbery was deepening to red, gold, and all shades of brown. Heavy dew lay glittering in the sunshine, on the smooth turf, on the webs the busy spiders had hung upon the rose-trees over-night. Lilith went thoughtfully along the gravel paths, when she stopped short. Willie was leaning against a tree, shading his eyes with his hand; his eyes were riveted upon Mrs. Drew's windows. He started as Lilith came near, and his look of gladness fled.

"O, I beg your pardon—it is you!" he said awkwardly.

Then he turned, and prepared to walk by Lilith's side.

"Yes, it is I," she said shortly; "but I did not come to ask you to walk with me;" and she turned round brusquely and walked away.

Her heart was full. She had to contront one of the bitter truths of her young life.

"Fool that I have been," she said to herself, clinching her teeth and turning her rage against herself—"fool not to have seen it all before! He loves her. That—that boy"—she paused and thought rancorously of his youth—"that boy dares to love my mother! It is preposterous, horrible, unnatural! It must be stopped before she knows it." Then a frightful doubt almost convulsed her, one sharp suspicion. "If perhaps— Oh, no; that is impossible!" she said, in the fervor of her loving filial faith. "She never can have supposed such a thing for an instant, good, sweet darling that she is, or she would never have invited him here. But I see it all now;" and she indulged in miserable retrospection. She remembered Willie's admiration of her mother's portrait on that first morning in Prince's Square; his constant mention of her; his intense interest and devotion during Mrs. Drew's short visit to town; his postscripts to her letters to her mother; his persuading her to make a copy of that pencil-sketch for him; his hanging it in his room; then "All his kindness, his care, was for her sake," was the finishing stroke to her discovery. Humiliated, stricken—she dared not imagine why—she flung herself upon the wooden bench in the wigwam and went through her bitter anguish alone. Perhaps shame—the shame of having loved so freely, so dearly, where she had not been loved at all—was the cruelest sting. For, as the moments throbbed on, she knew that, of all beings in the world, the only one who seemed desirable, beautiful, fascinating, perfect to her, was this man who loved her mother.

She was but a child. She did not recognize that this was a dangerous attachment which might turn to hate and imbitter her life. Her pure natural instincts were urging her to be good, to be patient,

to restrain, subdue, bridle, and direct these fierce sensations for the happiness of others.

"She has only me in the whole world," the poor girl pathetically thought of her mother. "My wretched mistake must not be her unhappiness. As if she had not had enough!"

Then she clinched her hot hands and made brave resolutions. He must never know—she must never know. But the sooner Willie could be coaxed to go the better. That quarter of an hour spent by Lilith in the wigwam that morning was a cruel one. But, as she quietly came out and composedly returned to the house, there was the sense of a victory gained stilling the quick beating of her wild heart.

They were at breakfast when she came in, and she took her place as usual. But she tried to talk and to be more genial than she had managed to be latterly, while Willie was more silent and did not devote himself so exclusively to Mrs. Drew. This Mrs. Drew noticed, not without a certain pique; and, as she talked even more gayly than usual, her color came and went. It was the beginning of the storm.

Breakfast over, Willie strolled into the hall, his hands in his pockets. He felt unsettled. The plans for the day were usually made at breakfast. But Lilith's peculiar manner this morning in the garden had given him a shock.

"She thinks something," he had said to himself, when Lilith rushed away.

This led to his reflecting. As he reflected, he began to realize the true state of affairs, so far as he was concerned. He did not dare even think of what Mrs. Drew might or might not feel for him. As for Lilith, she had only a relative existence in his eyes, and no change in this sentiment had occurred. She was to him but her mother's child.

Meanwhile Lilith, with her usual reckless impulse, had determined to act. She firmly believed that Willie could "persuade any one into anything." The idea of him as her mother's husband was so frightful that any step taken to prevent it seemed advisable.

"I will get him alone, and speak to him," she said to herself, going off to the parlor, where she knew she would find her mother arranging the housekeeping affairs with the cook.

Surely enough the cook and Mrs. Drew were closeted together in earnest discussion.

"In one minute," said Mrs. Drew, as Lilith came in, evidently primed with some important subject.

So Lilith sat down on the old sofa in the bay-window, and listened to the serious talk about certain soups and a certain pudding—talk more gravely sounding perhaps than the talk of the fate of nations in the great halls of solemn discussion.

"After all, do we not live the saying, 'Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die,' whatever we may profess?" Lilith asked herself somewhat bitterly.

The sneer was still on her face when, the door having shut upon the cook, her mother came and, gently seating herself by her child, took her hand, and said—

"What is it, dear?"

Something unworldly, tender, careful, in Mrs. Drew's voice and manner subdued Lilith.

"I only came to ask what were your plans for to-day," she said, kissing the soft caressing hand.

"I have none," said Mrs. Drew, smiling. "I really think that our invalid is nearly, if not quite cured, and that he ought to make plans for himself. Is it too warm for a ride? You have not had your rides lately, Lilith—because of the heat, of course. But suppose you and Willie were to ride over to Moor Heath? You might have luncheon there, and wander about while the horses were resting."

"I shall not propose it," answered Lilith shortly.

"No; that is my office, I expect," said Mrs. Drew. "I dare say we shall find him somewhere about. Come!"—and she preceded her daughter along the passages that led to the hall.

Willie was looking out of the window. When Mrs. Drew proposed the ride, he bowed, and said "With pleasure;" but he did not smile.

With a heavy heart Lilith went off to assume her riding-gear. But her mother left the "ungrateful young man," as she mentally termed Willie Macdonald, with a new feeling. Was it misgiving?

"Another disappointment!" she thought, almost sadly, as, from an upper window, she watched Lilith and Willie ride off. "When will they end? Is all sweet fruit bitter at the core? Will the blessing of Heaven never rest upon human love?"

She had vaguely imagined this sympathetic young man as a possible relation, nearer than a friend, in the time to come. She had not thought definitely as to what his relationship to her would be. She had assured herself that her fleeting idea of Willie as Lilith's husband was premature and in ill taste; so she had dritted through these summer days without steering and without looking ahead. They had been delightful days, and they were passing away out of sight, just like the figures of Willie and Lilith on their horses, which were fast dwindling as they trotted across the broad expanse of turf till they seemed the size of flies.

She sighed, then went down-stairs to Madam Ware, who had been receiving the village schoolmistress to talk upon the subject of working-materials for the schoolgirls. There was naturally some gossip between the cheery little apple-faced woman who taught the rustic maidens of Heathside, and the open-hearted, open-handed mistress of the Hall, over those huge rolls of flannel, calico, and chintz. Madam Ware heard all the latest tittle-tattle about who was expected to die, or what marriages and births were matters of conjecture, with here and there a regretful whisper that such a lad, who had promised so well, had taken to drink, or that Pavitt's young sister Letty, who had gone to live in London, had got herself into trouble, poor silly lass, *et cætera*, and listened, only saying, "You don't say so!" or "Dear, dear!" till the little woman made an observation that flushed Madam Ware's delicate withered cheek, and made her remove her spectacles—a habit of hers when perturbed or surprised.

"I hope you won't take it ill, madam; but they do say as Miss Lilian—I beg her pardon—Mrs. Drew—only the old folks in the village can't forget that she was their Miss Lilian—is going to be mar-

ried again. Some say it's the colonel, and others say it's the invalid gentleman. I laugh at 'em. 'Mrs. Drew marry again!' says I. 'Two Sundays'll come in a week before she'll own to having had two husbands!'"

"And you are quite right, Selina," said Madam Ware energetically.

And she would have told her *protegée* her "mind," but that Mrs. Drew entered; and the schoolmistress respectfully departed, half wishing she had not spoken.

Madam Ware began arranging her rolls of stuff, with the aid of her daughter's superior strength; then, after these were carried away to be sent to the school, she resumed her knitting, and telling Mrs. Drew she wanted to speak to her, she said, in her quiet, dignified little way—

"My dear, how long did we invite William Macdonald for?—because he seems quite well enough now to return home."

"How long?" Mrs. Drew looked sharply at her mother. "Oh, I am sure I don't know! I don't think any time was named. You see I invited him verbally through his mother, and the invitation was indefinite. Why do you want to send him away?"

Madam Ware expostulated.

"Far be it from me to send any sick lad away while he is weak and needs cosseting, my dear," she said. "But, when men are fit for their usual day's work, be it what it may, it isn't right for women to keep them tied to their apron-strings. Your father said to me only yesterday, 'Those gals are molly-coddling that boy.' He came upon you in the corner of the park where they've begun at the second hay-crop, and he said you were sitting on 'a heap of hay, and the lad was languishing on the grass'—those were the very words your father used—'languishing and turning up his eyes like a duck in a thunder-storm,' he said to me, 'when he ought to be on one of his native moors getting the breeze into his lungs and bagging grouse!' Those were his own words," said Madam Ware, knitting with extra vigor; "and now I've said my say, and I've done."

"There was no languishing in the matter—Mr. Macdonald was reading to me," returned Mrs. Drew calmly. "But, if my father thinks the young man is not doing well in remaining here, it will be as well that he should go. Not that I believe in papa's opinion, as you know, mother; but there is always something in what one man says of another. Who is to tell him, or hint this to him?" she asked, after a short pause. "Shall I?"

"Not if you will be annoyed, my love," said the old lady, tenderly, any lurking suspicion of a flirtation on the part of her daughter dispelled by Mrs. Drew's ready acquiescence. "I will, if you like."

"Oh, it will not annoy me!" declared Lilian. "I should have learned my hard life-lessons badly indeed if such a trifle as advising some one years younger than myself would be an annoyance!"

And she left her mother, holding her head high and inclined to be very busy indeed. Her usual occupations—needlework, serious reading, painting, visiting the neighbors, poor and rich, keeping up a correspondence with family friends, and helping the squire with his business-letters and accounts—had been utterly neglected since Willie's arrival. Her omissions seemed to fly at her all at once as

she went to her particular sanctum near the house-top. As she opened the door, the half-finished painting on the easel, the litter of unwashed brushes, dirty palettes, withered flowers, dying plants, were so many reproaches. The room that she had loved almost was chaotic in its confusion—neglected—veiled in dust. She sat down on her painting-stool and looked around. A queer thought made her ears burn—this looked as a bride's former sanctum might look when she returned from the long sweet absorption of her honeymoon.

"No; it's more like my own mind just now, all sixes and sevens," said Lilian, almost angrily to herself; and she set to work bravely.

After a few hours the room looked itself again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MEANWHILE Lilith and Willie had ridden to the village, their destination, in silence. They were both in perhaps their very worst humor. Willie felt as if his emotions, especially since his illness, had been "playing the fool with him." He blamed himself for not having recognized and dealt with his impulses. He rode absorbed in his own disquieting reflections, while Lilith was wrapped in a very dark mantle of self-hatred.

"How weak—how meanly weak I have been!" was her self-reproach, as she nerved herself to conceal her real feelings, and to seem what she wished to be.

The inn where Mrs. Drew had advised them to have luncheon was a rustic little house standing alone on the edge of the wide-spreading moor. It was a breezy spot. The whitewashed building was flanked by a few wind-blown Scotch firs. The wooden water-trough in front was scarred and seamed by the stormy weather, and even a mild August breeze swayed the faded picture of the coach and horses backward and forward on the sign-post. As the couple rode up, Willie called out. The horses snorted and sniffed at the trough; the steam rose in faint clouds from their moist bodies; the shadows of passing clouds purpled the dark furze in patches; but all lay silent in the sunshine, as if there were no life here except that of a busy hen clucking excitedly to her wandering, chirping brood to come away from the proximity of the monster hoofs of those strange panting steeds.

"One would think they were all dead!" said Willie grimly. Then he dismounted, knocked at the door, rang a shrill bell, and stood waiting; but there was no reply. He went back to Lilith. "It seems all shut up," he said. "What shall we do? Ride on?"

"There is no other place where we can get anything for miles," answered Lilith; "and the horses ought to rest here. Stop—here comes some one!" she added, as a lad came toward them from the road they had just traversed.

Lilith recognized him as the boy who attended to the horses the last time she and her mother drove to Moor Heath to sketch a sunset, and, springing down, asked his help. The boy fumbled in his pocket and brought out a key—the stable-key. He could feed the

horses, he said; but, as for lunch or food for the riders, his folk had gone to a christening and everything was shut up.

"They didn't expect folks to come their way to-day, they didn't. The coach comes somewheres about once a week, and then the missus is a-cooking from early till bed-time. If I had the key of the larder, there bean't nothink but a beef-bone and bread-and-cheese."

"Therefore we must starve," said Lilith to Willie.

The situation seemed to break down the barrier of their moods. They laughed.

"I don't mind for myself one bit," said Lilith; "but you are still —well, weak, you know."

"I am a great deal stronger than I care to be," returned Willie somewhat bitterly, going off to the shed which did duty as a stable to see that the horses really had their food.

The corn was satisfactory. Presently, after talking to the lad, he went back to Lilith.

"It is all right," he said triumphantly. "The safe is get-at-able. A silver coin was the key to our friend's secret. Come in!"

The lad opened the door. Lilith followed Willie through the narrow passage into the deserted tap-room, a tiny chamber with a sanded floor, with gay-colored prints hanging here and there, and benches and chairs ranged against the walls, before which stood mahogany tables with flaps, the atmosphere being strongly impregnated with stale tobacco-smoke and the fumes of beer.

Willie opened the window and looked out upon the sunlit heath, while the lad's clattering footsteps were heard as he lumberingly procured bread-and-cheese for his liberal guests. Lilith glanced about her. She was to be alone with Willie here; she was to speak of matters nearest her heart. She would remember these surroundings —the cheap mirror hung with cut yellow paper, the fly-blown map on one side, the flaring almanac on the other.

She watched the boy as he went awkwardly to and fro, first bringing forks and spoons, which were not wanted, then a tablecloth, which, upon being opened, proved larger than he expected, and lay in graceful folds upon the sanded floor. This overwhelming arrangement disturbing his rustic mind to a considerable extent, he stood and stared at it with round eyes, biting his thumb, till Lilith said—

"Look here! We don't want this thing." And, putting aside the array of forks and spoons, she assumed the command and quickly had the cloth folded and put aside. "Come—I'll help you!" she said; and in a minute or two the little table was spread with bread, cheese, beer, plates, and pewter-mugs, and she called to Willie that his lunch was ready.

He, turning from a contemplation of the sunny heath, a picture which forever after would return to him with the recollection of his somber puzzled thoughts on that memorable day, looked round. Lilith stood behind the spread table. She had a weird expression about her, to him, at that moment, her wavy black hair fluffed out around and above her dark, almost Egyptian face, her shining black eyes fixed upon him with their sharpest, most penetrating stare. He wondered how it was that this could be the child of that beautiful

fair woman whose existence was troubling his soul. He felt a mingled pity and respect for the wild clever girl he had almost loved as he would have loved her mother's shadow while that mother was away, who now, while the very touch of that mother's hand tingled about his palm, while the faint echoes of her voice lived in his ears, seemed superfluous, something out of place.

That hard fate, to be a bore, an unwished-for, undemanded thing to the one she loved, was Lilith's at this juncture. Fortunately for her, she was too absorbed by her own emotions and occupied with her struggle with herself, even to dream that this was the case.

"I don't want anything, really," said Willie Macdonald, looking disgustedly at the meager preparations, with a sigh of reminiscence as he thought of the luncheon-table in the darkened dining-room of the Hall—of his invalid delicacies—of the flowers—of Mrs. Drew presiding, and coaxing him to eat with earnest entreaty in her beautiful eyes. He had played at having a capricious appetite when he was honestly hungry, to enjoy her sweet persuasions, to watch the varied expressions of anxious solicitude play about her gentle face.

From Mrs. Drew and the acme of life-luxuriousness to Lilith and country bread-and-cheese and beer! This was a worse "come-down" than the descent from the pony-chair, with Mrs. Drew walking beside, shielding him from the sunshine with her white umbrella, to the Rector's chaise or the family landau. Still Lilith was Mrs. Drew's own, very own flesh and blood. As he remembered this, Willie turned from the window with a sigh, resigning himself to his fate.

"I dare say you don't like it; but you must eat something, if only a crust," said Lilith practically—"or else mother will scold me." And she cut bread and poured out beer, and ate herself, to encourage her charge.

"After all, Lilith, there is something about you which reminds me of your mother," remarked Willie, leaning back and looking at the girl with half-closed eyes. "I used not to think so; but, since I have been at Heathside, I have got to know the points of resemblance. It is in gesture, manner, expression—not in feature or form."

"No, not exactly," said Lilith, with a curious laugh, cutting her cheese into tiny dice. "Mother is beautiful, according to the laws of beauty; I am ugly, according to the laws of ugliness. I ought to have been born in Memphis centuries ago; then I should have passed muster."

"My dear, you must not think you are ugly," returned Willie, roused into kindliness. "Is not beauty in the eye of the beholder? But you are quite right as to your type. Egypt has stamped you as her own; but how—when—that is the puzzle."

"Don't let us talk about myself! If only I could forget myself for even a day, how I would thank Heaven!" cried Lilith desperately. "Willie, I really dislike the topic of myself—what I am, what I do," she added, calming herself. "Rather let us talk about you. It is such a relief to see you well again. When are you going back to work?"

"Back to work?" Such a question here, now, from Lilith, what did it mean?

"Yes, back to work," Lilith said decidedly. "You remember you told me—asked me indeed—always to speak my thoughts right out to you, just like you used to me. How much good you did me!" she added with a slight gulp—such a lump came in her throat when she thought of all that this young man had been to her—how he had inspired, consoled, urged her on her upward path with his earnest common sense, his brotherly sympathy! "You are well—yes, actually well—now, or you could not look as you do after that long ride. I know I have no experience; I am a fool in the world's ways; but somehow I cannot but think that you ought to be at your post—at your desk. I don't exactly say now, to-day, to-morrow, or the day after to morrow; but soon—as soon as you can manage it."

"Ah!" answered Willie, who had fixed his eyes on hers, which had not flinched, "I thought that was in your mind, Lilith, this morning, when you turned from me and left me—alone! Lilith," he went on earnestly, "you really do owe it to me to be frank. What does this mean? Why this sudden hurry to send me off? Are your grandfather and grandmother tired of me? Or—or—did your—your—mother say anything?" he added, fiercely almost. "Bah! What am I talking about? As if Mrs. Drew would commission any one, however trustworthy, to tell an unpleasant truth that it might happen to be her duty to tell!" He laughed; but he was perplexed, anxious; and it was but a hollow laugh.

"You are all at sea," said Lilith, calmly. "I am not given to being a channel for others' opinions to flow through, for one thing; and no one has said anything particular about you to me, for the second thing, except, of course, that you seemed a nice sort of person enough, and that you were a 'poor young man.' I resented this at first," she went on, some inward rage bursting into irony, which merely showed itself in an increased coldness and quietude of speech and manner; "but I suppose that it is customary to call a young man who has been ill 'poor young man,' isn't it?"

"Am I to suppose that you and your mother spoke of me in that sweetly compassionate way?" asked Willie, his color rising. "Well, I suppose I am—poor. I shall be poor—till—ah, Lilith, you don't know what it is to covet, to desire, to long for—not another man's goods—no, my life is not at such a low ebb yet, so you needn't look like that—to crave for something that you know God and man could not blame you for coveting, that you might take honorably before the world and glory in, and no one say with truth that you had no right to it. Well, I have a goal," he went on, passionately, rising from his seat and pacing the floor. "God has held out a prize before my eyes—does not every good thing come from God?—a prize so beautiful, so pure, so holy almost, that I would not dare to try to win and wear it if I had led a bad or a useless life. Yet I see it, as it were, receding from me hourly; do I not deserve to be called poor? You are but a child; still your time will come. With you it will be ambition—"

Here the lad came in, looking scared—for he had heard the raised voices, and his experience of raised voices was scarcely pleasant—and Willie checked himself.

Lilith, who had paled as she heard and felt the confirmation of her suspicions that Willie loved her mother, that he had so passionate a

sentiment for one whom she regarded as a creature almost sanctified by her double widowhood, unapproachable by man except with respectful veneration, replied to the boy's question when they wanted "th' 'orses" by "Now, at once."

"I thought you wished to walk about the heath?" said Willie, not without a certain relief that the expedition was half over.

"Not to-day," was Lilith's sort reply; and, gathering up her long riding-skirt, she went out and into the stable, where she rebridled her horse herself and mounted by stepping on the manger.

At that moment Willie was so obnoxious to her that she could scarcely have endured touching the palm of his hand with the sole of her riding-boot. Then she rode round to the front door, followed by the lad leading Willie's horse, and they trotted off homeward silently.

The breeze had got the better of the sunshine. The woods shone golden as they trembled in the first soft autumn wind. The sky was paling, and long fleeces of woolly cloud were streaming slowly across in their passage from ocean to sea. These past weeks there had been glowing heat, the atmosphere of languid, slumbering passion—stormy weather, when fierce words might seem to come naturally from the laden lips of a lover, to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning. But on this day Nature seemed in one of her serene calculating humors, sending steady breezes to shower the dying foliage softly upon the waiting earth, dispatching hordes of gentle mists to wander to parched spots, to fall mistily upon the thirsty flowers and seek out and moisten the withering roots. Insensibly, as the two passionate young people, one passionate with the still desperation of the North, the other with the impetuosity of the South, inherited from by-gone ancestors, rode homeward, charged with sensations that no repression would save from bursting forth ere long, the exterior calm came between them, held them back from a pitched battle of words, as bystanders might withhold two combatants, and prevented an explanation which might have altered the current of not only their lives, but the lives of many others.

They made no effort to continue their vague interchange of thought. Occasionally Lilith pointed out some house, giving a brief account of its inmates, or directed Willie's attention to some village the church-spire of which rose from among the trees. They cantered along side by side where the road was smooth, and Lilith led the way along the narrow lane which was a short-cut home.

Thus it was by a seeming chance that what happened afterward came to pass. It was a chance that led Lilith to propose a nearer way home—a chance that led Willie to assent to a change of route; a chance that, just as Willie was about to dismount to open a gate which barred their progress, the Rector came along on foot.

He looked grave; he had been sent for to a dying parishioner, and was now returning home. But this was not the cause of his gravity. The squire had been complaining to him that his "gals" were making fools of themselves, and making no secret of his wish that his nephew Colonel Ware and his daughter Mrs. Drew should "make a match of it."

"They're suited to each other down to the ground, don't you see?" he had said. "Geoffrey is a man o' common sense—no one

can deny that; then they're of an age, and their marriage would do away with all bad blood about his having the property. She'd have everything he's got, and he'd have what ought to be hers—exchange is no robbery. Now I haven't got no ill-feeling against your nephew, young Macdonald; he's been as welcome to the Hall and everything in it as the flowers in May. He's a decent sort of chap too, a well-meaning young man in his way, I dare say, and I haven't any call to say otherwise; but the fact of the matter is that I won't have him coming between those two and spoiling sport. Oh, don't say I'm on the wrong tack! I've courted the gals in my day, and it isn't so long ago that I've forgotten how young fools act the Romeo, Hamlet, Manfred business. I know it when I see it: and, when a lad of your nephew's age goes lying on the grass sighing and dying at a gal's feet, and when he ogles her over the chess-board so that he gets fool's mate every time, it means something—it means as much as when he sighs over his pipe in my smoking-room, and, if I tell him a good old tale, he don't know from Adam what the deuce it's all about. You can't interfere? I tell you it's your bounden dooty as the Rector of this parish—let alone as the young man's uncle—to put a stop to it!"

It was useless for Mr. Rawson to suggest that Lilith, who, although a child in years, was a young woman in both mental and physical development, might be the attraction, that in London Willie had been her shadow.

"Well, I don't contradict that; but the long and the short of it is that he's somebody else's shadow now," was the squire's reply. "Age? Don't talk to me of age! When I was sixteen years old, I was dead gone on the landlady of the 'Grapes' at Warnton, who weighed as many stone as I could count years, and who wore a front and went puffing about drawing the ale like a grampus. Young fellows like their fruit ripe; it's only the old ones as have the patience to watch it getting ready for 'em on the wall. And why's that? 'Cause they've had their taste of the other, and have come to the conclusion there ain't much in it!"

Before the squire had exhausted his arguments, the Rector had promised to do what he could. It was this promise which made him look grave when he met Willie and Lilith.

"How are you, my boy?" was his greeting to Willie; then he turned to Lilith, and told her he had just been thinking about her.

He was patting and smoothing the chestnut mare's shining neck.

"I want to talk to you about a painting of yours," he went on. "If I had not been so busy, I should have called at the Hall. When can I see you? When are you coming our way?"

"Now, if you like," said Lilith. "You would not mind riding home alone?" she asked, turning to Willie. "I should be back long before dinner."

"Not at all," answered Willie, as inwardly relieved to be rid of Lilith at this juncture as she felt relieved to be quit of him. So she turned the chestnut's head, and walked her down the wagon road through the fields toward the Rectory, while Willie went on through the wood alone.

At the end of the wood he would emerge into a lane. At the end of the lane he would find himself opposite the park gates.

He looked around. The wood was so still, green shades unfolding before him, drooping boughs on either side. Stray sunbeams came and fell upon the path, shattered, as it were, into fragments by the underwood before they scattered themselves upon the roadway. There was but a stir among the foliage now and then. As Willie listened to the horse's footsteps, to its breathing, audible in the silence, his thoughts flew before him to the Hall, to Mrs. Drew.

He must speak to her.

"If I did not speak—now—to-day—this very hour—it would be cowardly, it would be deceitful," he decided.

He touched his horse's flanks with his riding-whip. In less than twenty mintues the steed was in his stall, and Willie was searching for Mrs. Drew.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. DREW was not in the drawing-room; nor was she in the library. Willie was walking restlessly through the rooms and about the corridors, when he met the maid Mary, who told him that her mistress was in the garden.

He went eagerly out upon the terrace. The great white vases with the heavy green aloes stood out against the sky as they crowned the stone balustrades. The garden-seats were unoccupied. A chair stood crookedly in a shady corner, as if it had been hastily pushed aside. Over it hung a crimson shawl. The hound, Watch, was lying close by, as if guarding this. Recognizing Willie's footstep, he merely unclosed his eyes, and, lazily wagging his tail, contented himself with watching his kind London friend's movements as he descended one of the flights of steps leading to the flower-garden. Although Watch guarded the household and its belongings, he followed only his mistress Lilith, for whom he was waiting.

The beautiful Lilian Drew was not to be found among the stately dahlias, or under the crooked apple-trees. Willie went almost anxiously to and fro between the yew tea-pots and peacocks, under the spreading walnut-trees, too, where they had sometimes sat. Two chairs were cozily placed under a chestnut-tree, as if leaning toward each other. She was not there. Then he went down a grass-grown path between the tall laurels, a path that led to the wigwam under the poplar-trees.

The wigwam—a thatched hut, open in front opposite a cutting in the hedge which framed a sweet picture of smiling fertile woods and fields—was furnished with a hammock, a rustic table, and light easy-chairs—wooden frames slung with canvas. Willie came upon this suddenly; and, as his eyes sought the dark interior, he hardly realized that the recumbent figure in the hammock was that of Mrs. Drew.

He stood for a moment, fearing, wondering, abashed. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness within the wigwam, he saw the lovely little head perched on a cushion, the perfect profile he had dreamed of when asleep, and had watched with admiration while awake, standing out against the background of the dark wooden wall, as if molded in alabaster. He saw that the queen of his heart was there, alone, asleep. He stood gazing at her as if spell-

bound. He took off his hat. As a breeze rustled among the poplar-leaves, it seemed as if some voice whispered that the ground whereon he stood was holy. He felt reverent, devout, as he had seldom felt, even in those young days, the days when he, though a boy, had learned to know what religious fervor meant. He knew that he ought to turn aside, for, unnerved as he was, this was not the time and place to consult with this beautiful woman as to his comings and goings; he longed for the strength to turn away, to go back through the garden pathways to the house, and there to wait for the right moment when he might speak with good sense and deep respect.

But the more he urged himself to be gone, to move away, the more his eyes riveted themselves upon this Sleeping Beauty. He hated himself for his weakness, he detested the strength of his devotion to this gentle woman. He tried to think of her as wife, as mother—Lilith's mother; but these thoughts meandered harmlessly about his emotions without leaving a trace of their progress. She was to him as a goddess, an idol, a being to be worshiped with sacrifice—the sacrifice of his very will, if needs must.

He looked up into the chilly blue of the cold evening sky; but there was no help there. The poplars rustled their tall crowns. Down below, the dahlia-blooms seemed like red and yellow eyes, gazing derisively at him, as much as to say, "Why this fear? Why not 'go in and win'? What is there against thee as a suitor for this Sleeping Beauty more than there is against any other?"

This was true. Had he not an estate, a fortune to expect? Would not Mrs. Drew be robbed of her really rightful inheritance by the arbitrary laws of male primogeniture? Was there so very much reason in his hesitation to tell her that she was his first and only love? Why did he feel as if his love for her was akin to a crime?

He felt that he could not give a satisfactory answer to any of these adverse questions concerning his sentiments; so he was encouraged. Without further comment, he stepped noisily up the step, his riding-boots clattering upon the wooden floor of the wigwam.

Lilian sprung up in the hammock; her blue eyes were dazed with sleep. She supported herself by one of her fair hands, the other went up to rub her eyes.

"Oh—dear—me!" she said drowsily. Then sense and memory grew clearer. "I have been—asleep. It is you—Mr. Macdonald!" She gave one surprised look at Willie, then slipped down and stood opposite him. "I lay down to think out a vexed question—a regular problem which has been bothering me," she said, with a smile and a blush; "and, instead of thinking, I fell asleep. Oh, dear, I have been dreaming too! Where is Lilith?" she added, with sudden alarm. "Where is the child? I remember now! I dreamed that she had fallen off her horse—I saw that chestnut mare of hers careering about on her hind legs, pawing the air. You are sure she is all right?" she went on, forgetting her confusion at having been found thus by Willie in her anxiety about Lilith. "Where is she?"

Willie speedily calmed her fears, explaining that Lilith had gone to the Rectory, accompanied by Mr. Rawson himself.

Mrs. Drew sunk into a chair, and, with a little sigh of relief, asked Willie the time.

"Half-past four," he said, glancing at his watch.

"Nearly tea-time," remarked Mrs. Drew, suddenly remembering that her muslin dress was crushed, and that a great lock of hair tumbling upon her shoulder added to her disheveled appearance. She could scarcely walk to the house, looking as she did, escorted by Willie.

"I am certain you must feel dusty after your ride," she said, hoping he would take the hint and depart. "I am sure you will be glad of a cup of tea. By the time you are ready I shall be in the drawing-room prepared to wait upon you," she added.

But Willie sat himself decidedly down upon the rustic table. He put aside his riding-whip, and drew off his gloves.

"We have loads of time," he said determinedly. "Mrs. Drew," he added firmly, "I came here to have a talk with you, and speak I must."

She gave him one curious inquiring look, then seated herself, her heart sinking just a little.

"Yes?" she said doubtfully, looking grave.

All the brightness had faded from her face at the very idea of his having "a talk" with her. Willie's hopes—whatever they might be—were disconcerted at the very outset.

"Lilith—has been telling me—I ought to go back to London," he began awkwardly, taking up his whip and examining a flaw in the ivory handle; "so I came to ask you if you had commissioned her to give me my *congé*."

"I—commission—Lilith! What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Drew. Up went her head with her sensation of wounded pride; then, as she thought, "First, my mother said this, now Lilith," the blood rushed to her cheeks.

"I mean what I say," said Willie.

"As if—as if—if I wanted to tell you you were wasting your time I should delegate a child—my child—to say so, instead of advising you myself!" Mrs. Drew gave a short laugh of annoyance. "I did think you knew me better!"

"You have told me the truth—your thoughts—without meaning it," said Willie, mingled anger and a wild feeling of unreasoning passion fighting with his efforts at self-control. "No one likes to hear truth and to tell it better than I. You think I am wasting my time. I am not, so far as I am concerned. Listen! When I found that my accident would lead to my coming here, I blessed that accident, just as a few minutes ago I blessed my good luck that Lilith gave me an excuse to seek a private interview with you." Mrs. Drew half rose.

"Whatever are you talking about?" she said, although her heart was beating quickly, for she felt what must come, if some chance did not bring an interruption. "I really don't understand you."

"You will understand me presently," answered the young man, rising and strengthening into the semblance of far maturer manhood by the very force of strong feeling. "First, about this question of waste of time. I am not bound to work—at least, not by the rules of society. Perhaps you do not know that by and by I shall be—if I live—a rich man. I do not say that the estate which will come to me is as beautiful as this; but the rent-roll is larger. Then I have

private property apart. If I did not feel that—that in worldly circumstances I am what the world calls 'a good match,' I should not be here—now."

He paused. There was no mistaking the burning look that he fixed upon Lilian Drew. Feeling that to construe his words into a declaration of love for Lilith would be absurd, the once wife, now widow, thought, "All is lost." Her moral strength was ebbing fast. She turned pale, and fixed her eyes upon him with dread. This man, so young—a boy in comparison with herself—to be taking the law into his own hands, to be seemingly subjugating her will by the power of his own! It was terrible!

"Ah," he cried triumphantly, as he read her recognition of the truth in her face, "you know!" Then he put aside her outstretched hands; he took no more notice of her little cry of fear than if it had been the chirp of a bird his gun might be pointed at.

He raised her, almost unresisting, into his arms. He told her of his love, his adoration: how it had sprung up at the sight of her portrait, had grown and strengthened during his long talks with Lilith about her mother—her sweet injured mother; how it had leaped into the furious passion it now was—as smoldering fire breaks into flames when fed with oil—at the sight of her—actual, living, in the flesh. Love had given Willie Macdonald patience, earnestness; now it gifted him with tenderness, eloquence, solicitude, a daring, too, which could not offend the most shrinking and fastidious woman, even did she not already love him.

As he held Lilian Drew's slight trembling form in his arms, as if she were some precious creature that would vanish or melt if he lost that hold; as he kissed her hair, her dress, the hand that lay limply against his breast—in all his daring not dreaming to touch her pale lips with his—she felt as if in a new world, under different conditions. Struggling feebly against herself, she said incoherently—

"Leave me! Have pity—I am weak, tired!"

But, saying, "My wife—my beautiful darling wife!" he merely held her more closely to him, as he repeated endearing words—words of tender respectful hope. For a few minutes Lilian Drew was the prey of impulse. This was her first taste of that dangerous draught, earthly joy, which so often poisons those who dare to drink of it. She was loved, and she loved in return. She struggled vaguely to repulse her young lover. Her age, his age, her widowhood, Lilith—these thoughts came startling her out of her delicious apathy. Then came the sound of a clear ringing voice outside—

"Mother! Where are you, mother?"

It was Lilith. Her footsteps were approaching upon the gravel path. She had heard that her mother was in the wigwam. She did not know who was there also. Mrs. Drew sprung away from Willie, mechanically smoothing her hair. He reassumed his seat on the table.

"Oh!" Lilith looked disconcerted as she saw him, he meeting her eyes with a new reckless expression. "I did not know you were here. Tea is ready, mother."

"Very well," said Mrs. Drew.

Lilith and a revulsion of feeling had arrived simultaneously. Shame, self-reproach, and passionate love were making her desper-

ate. She was, as it might be, gambling with her life. One chance was left. Which—what should it be?

"Mr. Macdonald has been asking me whether I did not think he ought to go back to London and to his work," she said, looking first at her daughter, and then, almost desperately, at Willie; "and I told him that I thought he ought to return as soon as possible. I may seem rude," she added, with a laugh—yes, actually with a laugh!—"but sometimes one has to be rude in this life to do justice to others." Then she slid her arm within her daughter's, and the two went walking toward the house as if nothing had happened.

Was it caprice, was it acting, or was it true? Willie stood for a moment, feeling stunned. Could it be possible, he thought, as he looked at the hammock, the table, the lounging-chairs, that a few moments since Mrs. Drew was lying on his breast as his future wife?

Failing to understand his beloved, he walked slowly toward the house; but he had not the heart to go into the drawing-room and talk nothings over the tea-table. "I do not pretend to histrionic talent," he said to himself. He went to his room, and walked about restlessly till it was time to dress for dinner. When the man-servant brought his hot water, he also brought him a note. "The explanation," he thought, revived by the sight of Mrs. Drew's handwriting. He could scarcely wait till the man retired, after fidgeting about the room for some purpose or other. After the interloper was bolted out, his trembling fingers tore the envelope apart. What was this?

"DEAR MR. MACDONALD,—You took me by surprise this afternoon, and you must not mistake a manner which was really half faintness, half unconsciousness. There can, of course, be no question of our relations, which are those of good friendship. Do not mistake your own feelings. The young are only too apt to do this, to their lasting misery. Now you must make your own plans, and stay or go just as it pleases you. You will find me the same as before the little effervescence of this afternoon, which no one can regret more keenly than your faithful friend,

"LILIAN DREW."

At first Willie was in a rage. He tore the letter to fragments.

"I will go at once," he said, tearing his clothes from their resting-places and wildly beginning to pack.

But, as is generally the case when people are in a state of violent excitement, nothing would go right. As he flung his coats upon the bed, they tumbled off upon the floor. His portmanteaus refused to be unlocked—patent keys have an objection to be rashly dealt with—his shirts fell limply asunder when he essayed to arrange them in piles. The blade of a razor flew out and gashed his finger; stanching the blood calmed him.

"Why should I rush off all in a hurry because a woman is capricious?" he asked himself, as the second dressing-bell rang.

Then he remembered the lovely expression in her eyes when they were raised to his as she lay in his arms. That expression could mean—only one thing!

"I shall stay," he said; and he soberly returned his belongings to their drawers and pegs.

When the dinner-bell rang, Mrs Drew, nervously fluttering about the drawing-room, saw Willie come in, tranquil, sedate, firm. He said a few words to Madam Ware, then came across to her.

"I received your note," he said, with an air of possessorship. "You were quite right, I dare say, from your point of view: but you must excuse me if I tell you that it made me laugh, and has had no effect upon me whatever."

Then he crossed over to Madam Ware, and, escorting her with more than usual care, devoted himself to her for the rest of the evening, while Mrs. Drew was sick at heart, and Lilith looked darkly on, wondering.

CHAPTER XX.

THE moment comes in the lives of most men who possess any energy when they desire somewhat with the whole power of their being, and, desiring, turn all their efforts to obtain, be it fortune, fame, supremacy, or a wife.

Willie Macdonald was twenty-eight. He had lived actively, but soberly. Full of vivacity and determination, he had commanded both these qualities. He was master of his passions. Looking back upon his life, there was no ghost to start up and confront him, the memory of no pale agonized face convulsed by his agency into that expression of pain. There was nothing important that he would have wished undone. So, when an honest and laudable affection filled him to the full, he promised to be invulnerable.

He was determined to make Lilian Drew his wife, and she knew it. She read it in his face that night at the dinner-table, and afterward in the drawing-room. And, though she loved him, she read it with dismay, because she feared that the girlish heart of the curious, reticent Lilith had been already given unasked to her "hero," as she herself had teasingly called Willie to Lilith.

"I must know, I must find out," she told herself recklessly. "If Lilith loves him, he must go, or I must go; we must not meet again except in totally different circumstances."

So she went to Lilith's room that night. The girl had just undressed and had got into bed. Her mother sat down, and talked about ordinary matters in her usual caressing way; then she suddenly spoke of Willie.

"Do you know," she began, "I thought you two were much greater friends than I find you are. You have thrown Mr. Macdonald a great deal on my hands during this visit, child."

"Oh, we are good friends enough!" said Lilith, roughly, jerking aside her mane of black hair, and vindictively thumping her pillow. "But Willie, when he is at work, is very different from the lounging, dreamy, absent young man who has mooned about here these last weeks. If he had been like that when I first knew him, I should have had a contempt for him, instead of liking him as I did."

"But you—you like him still?" interrogated Mrs. Drew, feeling guilty.

"When one has liked, one can't unlike to order," said Lilith, stretching herself out at full length and staring at the ceiling. "Some may perhaps; but I can't. Anyhow, I shall like Willie

much better when he has gone back. He is doing nothing. Even if he does not work in town, he can see after old Mr. Law and—and read in the Museum to improve his mind. Anything is better than getting you talked about."

Thus Lilith blurted out the truth. She had not meant to be so sudden in telling her mother of her talk with the Rector that afternoon. But Mrs. Drew had led up to it; so she had to listen to village gossip—how some people paired her with the colonel, and others with the sick man she had tended so affectionately.

"I can't imagine why they busy themselves like that with your affairs, mother. It is positively exasperating," declared Lilith. "You look too young and too pretty—that's what it is. You will have to wear gowns like grandmother's, and hide that hair of yours away under a cap. Oh, no, though, I couldn't bear that!"

"Age comes soon enough," said Mrs. Drew, kissing her daughter's forehead. "Meanwhile you must make haste and be grown up and get married; then they will have your business to amuse them." And she went off to her own room, flushed, in a humor that, for her, was desperate.

"I married!" mused Lilith bitterly. She had managed to hide her feelings bravely through the evening. Even Mrs. Drew did not dream that her daughter had read a mutual understanding in her and Willie's faces, and that anguish was wringing her very heart. "He loves her, he loves her!" Lilith repeated to herself. "And—even if she does not return it—he will marry her."

All through her sleepless night Lilith lay hoping that the colonel would come back, fearing that even now her mother might have been betrayed into promising herself, imagining the wedding, picturing Willie as—oh, horror and detestation!—Willie, who had seemed such a boy, with such boyish ways—her step-father!

"One thing is, grandfather would not hear of it, grandmother would hate the idea, and Mr. Rawson— Oh, she would never go against us all!" said the poor child, feverishly tossing under this which promised to be her first real trouble.

Meanwhile her mother was in a curious humor.

"I have done what I could," she assured herself in a quiet manner which was tinged with obstinacy. "And I intend to put my own inclinations aside, wherever my duty to others is concerned, to the very end. More I cannot do."

And she undressed leisurely and retired to her couch without shedding a tear, or in any way betraying excitement. Indeed the startling scene with Willie in the afternoon had not disturbed her tranquillity as she expected it would. Or was it that she had unconsciously given herself over into his hands, to be dealt with according to his pleasure?

After sleeping quietly, she rose early and went into the garden as usual. He was there before her. He came out from under the chestnut tree where the two garden-chairs were placed, and, taking her garden-basket and scissors from her, said—

"Sit down."

She gave an embarrassed laugh, as if he were in jest, treating her as if she were some little schoolgirl; but she sat down nevertheless.

"Give me those gloves!" he said.

"Certainly not!" she answered.

But he simply seized her left hand and drew off the thick glove she wore when gardening, kissed it, and laid it in the empty basket at his feet.

"That one will do," he said, holding her struggling hand. "It is of no use struggling," he went on, tightening his grasp, and fixing his eyes upon her. "You may wriggle and writhe and fret, and put yourself and myself to a great deal of useless trouble; it will be no good; I mean to have you. I love you—you love me—"

"I did not say so," interrupted Mrs. Drew, flushing. "I was going to speak to you seriously about yesterday. At the moment I was too surprised, too—too shocked," she said, trying to be dignified. "You were very, very ungentlemanly!"

"I mean to be still more so," announced Willie coolly. He had seized her ring-finger, and was drawing off her wedding-ring and the guard her faithless husband had given her shortly after their engagement. "Do you see this?"—putting both rings into his waistcoat-pocket. "You have said good-by to that farcical emblem of a broken tie. You will not see those rings again in a hurry. You will wear this—drawing a ring with a single diamond which had belonged to his dead father from his finger, and placing it on hers—"till I can place another one there."

"I cannot! You must not talk of marriage," said Mrs. Drew, half yielding, half amazed at this taking of herself by storm. "You had no right—yesterday—to call me by that name! I am—I mean I have been—a wife!"

"No; that I deny," replied Willie firmly. "That miserable union was a fiction. What do I say? It was more; it was an outrage—an outrage upon the holiest, most beautiful tie in nature. You have yet to learn what that is; but you shall learn. I have sworn to myself that your life shall be full of joys—shared with me; full of kindness, help to others, shared by me—at least, all the toiling difficult part—and that no grief shall enter your beautiful heart till it has spent its fury in mine first."

"You are too hard upon me!" said Lilian. It was as if her power of resistance had gone from her with her "poor rings," as she had sadly called them to herself sometimes. "You forget I am so much older—years older than you are. Then what would people say? It would lead to a family quarrel. Fancy my father! I cannot think of it; it is absolutely impossible!"

Willie smiled to himself—an elated little smile. He had scarcely expected capitulation so soon. For he knew that, when a woman begins to argue with a man about the possibility or impossibility of their being husband and wife, she has virtually capitulated.

Here the breakfast-bell rang and recalled Lilian Drew to the sense of the fitness of things.

"Give me my rings. Don't let us talk nonsense. Here is yours," she said, holding out Willie's ring, with a pleading look. "Come—there's a dear boy!" she added, speaking as she had spoken—half in jest—when he was a weak invalid and almost childishly obstinate. "Do not make me look ridiculous."

"If it were only a matter of seeming ridiculous, I should have an easy task before me in carrying you off in triumph," answered Wil-

lie, rising and taking some steps toward the house, but taking no notice of her outstretched hand holding the ring. "People are welcome to laugh as much as they please. There is not too much laughter anywhere. No; we—or rather I—have some difficulties to go through before we can begin our life together. I am prepared for them. What—putting the ring in your pocket? All right; you will wear it by and by. I don't care whether you do now or not. Well, first, there is a prejudice against a man—whatever his years—marrying a woman older than himself. The striking instances of happy marriages where the wife has been older go for nothing. If there is only a month's difference on what they persist in calling the 'wrong side,' every one is up in arms prophesying disaster. They forget the importance of a woman's influence over a man, and how much more likely it is that for that influence to be good where a woman has learned her life-lessons. The squire is no philosopher; he will object. Your mother— Well, from what I have seen of her, she will not care for me as a son-in-law. As for my people, my mother will like anything that promises me happiness; and, as for the rest, whatever they say to me or of me will go in at one ear and out at the other."

"But Lilith?" said Mrs. Drew. Each moment she was becoming more entangled in this strange web, and felt herself, to her consternation, more and more in her lover's power. "Fancy—you—Lilith's— Oh, it is preposterous!" she exclaimed, pausing and trying to be firm, to end this sweet fooling once and for all. "Cannot you see how horribly unnatural it is for us to be discussing such an arrangement? Why," she went on, her face aglow with a burning blush, "you look hardly older than Lilith; you might be her brother!"

"All I know is that you look very beautiful!" said Willie, with the fond impudence of success. "If you wanted me to give you up, you should not look like that. Come—let us go in and have our last half-hour's peace. I intend to make a clean breast of it to every one concerned, to take them all by storm at once. But a storm it will be, unless I am considerably mistaken."

Mrs. Drew turned to speak; but Willie slid rapidly by, threw open the dining-room door, and stood there with a bow and a mocking smile. The squire, Madam Ware, and Lilith were all there. There was nothing for it but to walk in and behave as unconcernedly as she could. The victim went to her doom; but she was no unwilling victim. In spite of the unpleasantness of what she still considered the "false position," there was a new joy in her heart, a certain mischievous pleasure natural to human nature in the plucking of a species of forbidden fruit; a holiday feeling, in fact, which made her feel and look years younger.

Lilith, pale, serious, with large dark circles round her tired eyes, read her fate in those two faces—faces that were both so dear to her apart, but the sight of which together thus was almost insupportable. But Madam Ware prattled on to Willie, and the squire, who was going to a sale of yearlings at a stud-farm some miles away, hurried through his breakfast, both of them utterly unsuspicious of the startling disclosure that awaited them.

"Can I speak to you, sir?" was Willie's first shot, as the squire

rose from his chair, and was fumbling in his pockets for the marked catalogue of the sale, his thoughts full of a certain bay colt he knew a neighboring farmer was "sweet upon."

"Speak to me, lad?" The squire could not find the paper, and was racking his brains as to where he could have put it. "Why, I'm off to the stables; but, if you like to walk down with me—Bless me, there's the thing!" he said, diving into his breeches-pocket and drawing out the catalogue. "I'd give any one a fi'-pun note if they'd tell me how it come there. I could ha' sworn I had it in my coat-pocket. Of all the— But it don't matter; only I wouldn't ha' lost that, with Squire Brown's marks against the lots, for anything. Here, come along, lad!" he went on, going out in a tremendous hurry. "What is it? Going home?"

"Not to the home you mean, squire, certainly!" said Willie. "It depends upon you, to a certain extent."

The squire, who was going steadily down the path that led through the orchard to the stables, his empty pipe between his teeth and his hands in his pockets, looked round somewhat startled.

"What are you talking about?" he asked sharply, thinking that when he said to himself the lad was daft he might not have been so far from the mark.

"I want your consent to my marriage with your daughter—Mrs. Drew," said Willie, slowly and distinctly.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the squire, so taken aback that his pipe dropped from his mouth and shivered into pieces on the gravel without his noticing it. "Lord 'a mercy save us!" he added piously. "You don't mean to say as you want to marry a married woman—a widow, I mean—a boy like you? There, hold your tongue like a sensible lad, d'ye hear? I'm not angry," he added pacifically, looking askance at Willie as he took off his hat and mopped his forehead. "I know you've got your senses all right enough, except just where the horse—mischievous brute!—kicked you. He's left a bee in your bonnet," he went on, with confused compassion. "It'll be all right when you're home with your own folks. Only, for mercy's sake, don't go talking like that to the women! D'ye hear?"

The squire was forming vague plans of sending for the Rector to convey this young madman away at once—away anywhere, out of the women's way.

"He'll be asking me for madam, next, or the child!" he thought.

"I have spoken to Mrs. Drew," said the young man quietly, "and she was aware that I was about so ask you this. It is a mere matter of form, of course; she is of age."

"Upon my word!" cried the squire, his temper rising as he began to recognize that this was something more than a freak of an injured brain. "I wish to God the colonel was here to take ye to task for a piece of impudence! Marry you indeed! Why, my darter, if ever she marries again, 'll marry her cousin, Colonel Ware—my heir! But what am I thinking of, parleying with a young fellow who comes to me and dares say my Lilian's a jilt! There's many a man u'd knock you down, sir, for less than that. But I don't forget you're my guest; only, if you don't give me your word that this fool's talk don't go any further— There—what am I talking

of?" he went on, looking bewildered. "You say my only gal—my own gal has told a boy like you to come and ask me to let you be her husband—my gal, who's never done anything that wasn't sensible, whose opinion I'd ha' taken on any subject before that of any man I know, girl though she is? You want me to believe she's been playing fast and loose with her cousin? Why, her marriage with my nephew the colonel's been the talk of the country round!" The squire paused, breathless.

Willie felt a jealous pang. His love for Lilian Drew was too passionate not to be keenly—ay, and even unreasonably—jealous. It was this first attack of jealousy which led him into an unchivalrous action. He took Lilian Drew's rings from his pocket, and, holding them out, said significantly—

"I see, sir, you require proofs that I am not a liar!"

There lay poor Lilian's pearl and diamond circlet glittering in the sun. The squire recognized the ring at once; his expression changed.

"Now, sir, perhaps you believe me," said Willie, re-pocketing the rings.

"No, sir, I don't," blurted out the squire. "I remember seeing a play once where a poor innocent girl come nigh to her death through a villain hiding himself in her room and stealing off her arm while she lay asleep a bracelet her husband had given her. I'm not one certainly to say as stage-plays and real life's the same. But what can happen in one can come to happen in the other. I don't say as you've stole my gal's rings—far from it; but I do say—and I mean—as I won't take any man's word against any of my womenfolk—no, not if it was a king on his throne! And, if you've got a spark of a man left in you after betraying my gal to me by showing me rings which, if she had 'a' given them to you, ought to 've been kept sacred between your two selves, you'll come back to the house wi' me now and let me hear what she's got to say in the matter!"

"Willingly," said Willie, turning and keeping pace with the agitated old man. Although his warfare was more of an undignified skirmish than the orderly campaign he had planned, he was still buoyant, hopeful, resolute.

To reach the hall door they must pass the terrace; the long drawing-room windows opened upon the terrace. While the afternoon sun glared upon that side of the house, the gay Italian blinds were drawn down; but during the morning they were not; and, as the squire hurried by the first window, Willie saw Mrs. Drew and Madam Ware sitting together on a sofa, Mrs. Drew's fair head bending close to her mother's cap.

"The ladies are there," he said to the squire.

"Where?" asked the squire; then, perceiving them, he knocked at the window.

"Why, if it isn't your father back again, and in one of his tantrums!" said Madam Ware; while Mrs. Drew rose and opened the long window.

Willie gave her a proud encouraging smile as he followed his perturbed host into the room. But Lilian had already made up her mind that with this man lay her chance of a real actively happy, almost a glorious life. She had decided. The quiet calm of decision was shown by her expression, by her bearing.

The squire gave her a look of angry inquiry: then he turned to his wife.

"I've come back," he said. "This young gentleman here has scared me finely, coming after me with a rare tale. Egad, my girl, I don't half like to tell ye! Here!" he went on, turning to Willie. "I've no time to spend on follies. Out wi' the gal's rings and beg her pardon!" Then he stopped short.

Mrs. Drew bent her head; she was red to the roots of her golden-brown hair. So the murder was out! She could imagine that her father had disbelieved Willie till the rings became a necessary piece of evidence.

"Why, you don't mean to say as it's true?" The squire's blue eyes blazed as he looked from the young man, who seemed stalwart and strong, despite his late weakness, by the very force and strength of the position he assumed, to Lilian, ashamed, drooping. "Well!" The "Well!" was a concentrated cry of wonder, disgust, disappointment. After one glance of mingled pity and anger at Mrs. Drew—he could not bring himself to look at the young man who had quietly walked in between his hopes of Lilian's marriage with the colonel and their fulfilment—the squire turned to Madam, who was looking through her glasses, wondering and guessing, and said, "I leave this precious pair of fools to you. P'r'aps, being a woman, you'll understand them—I can't. Here, you two!" he went on, waving his hand toward the culprits—he could not bring himself to look at them. "Years ago, Lilian, when you came back here to the old home, I swore to myself I wouldn't be the one to cross your woman's whims. I knew you'd have your whims, or you wouldn't be a woman. Well, I never thought you'd get it into your head to marry a boy, or I'd never ha' swore that oath; but, having swore, I've got to stick to it; so I can't prevent ye, though in my opinion you're going into the blazin' fire after being well-nigh frizzled to death in the frying-pan. There—I've no patience to talk about it! I wash my hands of ye. Madam there can take the matter up if she likes. I'm off"—and he made for the window and strode off, muttering to himself, to the stables.

There the men flew at the sight of his purple visage and angry eyes.

"There's suffint mortal wrong," they said, as he rode off on his big black mare. They had not seen the squire like that since the day when he received the news of the unworthy Captain Drew's death.

"He'll have a fit afore he's done," said the old groom, who owned to having served the Wares "a matter o' four-and-twenty years or so," and who went to fill a pail at a pump outside to watch if his burly master rode straight. He was relieved in his mind when he returned to the stable-yard. "T' parson's comin' along," he said; "parson'll talk him over; he allers does. It'd be a bad day for the lot of us if parson took it into his head to move hisself, like parson Redgrave did at Warrum"—Wareham, a neighboring parish.

Mr. Rawson, who had felt uneasy since his interview with Lilith on the previous afternoon, was bent on finding out the actual position of affairs, and, if he could not alter it, at all events to help all concerned as far as he might. From long experience of human crises,

from long sympathy with the inner joys and loves of human hearts which had been bared to him as they could never have been had his own been less full of love for his fellow-creatures, he had learnt to read that difficult alphabet—the outward manner. He had read in Lilith's manner yesterday, first, that she loved Willie Macdonald with a precocious woman's love; secondly, that she feared a marriage between him and the mother she had until now adored. Thinking back, the Rector's conclusions were supported by facts—Willie's devotion to the ungainly, unattractive Lilith, his rapid recovery at the Hall.

"She—she has actually yearned for an object for those affections of hers lying fallow all these years," thought the Rector of Mrs. Drew, as he rode swiftly through the park. "Lilith went away; then I prevented that boy Gerald—the actress's son—from usurping the position which was the very last he was entitled to. Why could she not take to Colonel Ware? It would have been so completely satisfactory. He is a nice man enough—but, no, it must be that boy! It is more than annoying." He looked annoyed until he met the squire, then he felt dismayed.

"A nice kettle of fish!" blustered the squire, reining in the mare; then followed a disjointed account of "that lad's impudence" and "Lilian's folly." "Do what you can, won't you?" he asked Mr. Rawson almost pleadingly. "Though it'll be no good. Lilian's got my obstinacy. If she sets her heart on a thing, she'll have it. You say he's a 'good young man.' So he may be; but he isn't heir to the Hall; and he ain't a colonel who's seen life. That's what riles me as much as anything."

Here the Rector said all he could in favor of his nephew. It was a delicate position for him, for, having been instrumental in placing Lilith with his sisters in London, he had unconsciously brought these two—Mrs. Drew and Willie Macdonald—together.

"Of course he would never have dared to propose marriage, squire, if he had not as good expectations as any young man of his position in London," said the Rector soothingly; then he briefly related how Willie, although he had sensibly accepted a Civil Service appointment, was independent so far as income was concerned. His father had left a comfortable capital, which was allowed to accumulate, except for the small income drawn by the widowed Mrs. Macdonald. Then, apart from this, Mr. Law had made him his heir, and he had great expectations from an eccentric bachelor-uncle—the head of his father's family.

The squire went on to the sale somewhat pacified, although, to do him justice, he did not care so desperately for wealth. He would rather Lilian had remained widowed and acting mistress of the Hall. His content in the idea of her marrying the colonel was purely and simply that his own child should continue to live on the estate, that possibly his own gandson might be his representative.

"If the lad were the future King of England, it 'ud be just the same, Rector," were his parting words. "Th' land's been the Wares' since it's been th' land it is. It's got their fatness in it. We never spared our money when the good o' the land was at stake. Many's the acre that has lain fallow when we'd ha' given something to have the money's worth of the crop. Look where you may it's

got our marrow, has th' land. And to think my gal' had the chance o' living and bearing sons upon it made up for the bad day when I knew Madam had no more chance of givin' it an heir. What a precious old fool I was to go a-counting of my bantlings before I'd found a hen to sit upon the eggs! I feel as I did when I went and sailed a paper boat on a puddle when I was a lad, and another lad came up and swamped it."

The Rector sympathized with the squire. Still he sympathized with Mrs. Drew, and most of all with Lilith.

CHAPTER XXI.

LILITH! No sooner had the squire disappeared from the drawing-room than Mrs. Drew said to Willie, with a look of pain—

"You talk to my mother; I must go to Lilith."

And she went away to find her only child. Lilith seemed to her to-day all the token that her former marriage, her husband's desertion, his death, and the existence of the woman he had eloped with and her beautiful children, was not some long troublous dream. For she felt like a girl in love with her first ideal. Already she had unconsciously selected this man who had imperiously seized upon her as her standpoint to judge others by. His tall fair figure was the figure, his keen bright blue eyes were the eyes, his manner was the right manner, his voice was an unequaled voice. As she went, with misgiving, to seek Lilith, to hear what Lilith thought, to try to modify her life according to her duty to Lilith, the real theme of her thoughts was Willie—how he could rise in the world with his will, with his eloquence—how he could benefit his fellow-creatures with his generous nature in active play—as it would, should be, with herself to urge him on—she, who had served a bitter apprenticeship to teach her the great art of wifehood!

"Lilith!" she had called when she reached the first corridor. There was no reply. The old portraits—sullen men's faces, sad, faded women, with here and there an eager girlish beauty, or a simpering boy, or a bright-faced child—stared at her from the walls. Each of these had a life-story—each of these, except those who had laughed through a short span and had sunk, with a smile at Heaven, into some little grave, had yearned and sorrowed and desired, had stemmed through a punishment of long-drawn-out monotony, or had dared more and had died remorseful. Now she, another Ware, had her fate in her hand for the second time, and was about to stake it. She herself? "I have not yet promised," she told herself, discouraged as the dread of evils was aroused within her by the pale stare of her ancestors' painted eyes. "Lilith shall decide. As Lilith decides, so will I."

The morning sky flung blue lights through the wide windows on to her fair face as she went upward to the studio—to Lilith. She opened the door with fear and trembling.

"Lilith!" she said; and her voice sounded harsh and grating in her ears, as if it had been some other voice. There were the canvases on the easels, the drooping cloths flung over them, the high chairs, the tables—a thrush fluttered in his wicker-cage; but there was no Lilith.

She went away to Lilith's room. She knocked, then heard her heart go thud, thud against her chest as she stood waiting. It was a relief to hear her child's voice say, "Come in!" In the midst of her new love, mentally drunken as she was with its glamour, how dear was that voice—how she loved the child of the man who had scorned and cast aside her young life!

"Ah!" said the tall girl significantly as she saw her mother enter. Lilith's bedroom was the large chamber at the top of the house which had been her day-nursery. Even now, while one end was furnished, boudoir-like, with a new-fashioned bed, with muslin draperies caught back with satin ribbons, the old fire-guard stood before the antique grate. The quaint old prints which had formed ideas in Lilith's baby-mind hung, brown and fly-blown over the mantelpiece. The tables and chairs dated back to a time when Lilith's existence was not thought of—when this mother who came seeking her here was a fair, soft, and lovely child, babbling as she staggered with plump outstretched hands from one chair to the other. Lilith had been leaning her elbows on the cushioned window-seat, looking out upon the rookery in the swaying elm-tops, where the rooks, cawing, fluttered and flustered, and gazing down into the park upon the meeting of her grandfather and the Rector, drawing conclusions from their attitude and their gestures with the unerring instinct of interpretation which first stamps the painter born.

When her mother opened the door and came in, with her fair face alive with varied emotion, the girl knew that her life, in regard to her mother and to Willie Macdonald, had come to a sudden painful climax.

There was a sadness in the girl's face, at which her mother instinctively drew back; but Lilith smiled, and, going toward her, drew her pretty fair head upon her shoulder tenderly, kissing the soft hair as if she were the mother and Mrs. Drew the child.

"Mother, you have made up your mind to be married again," she said. "Well, no one will be astonished—I suppose no man has come to the house for an hour on the merest pretext, but the village gossips have married you to him," she added bitterly. "I ought to have known."

"I will never marry any one, Lilith, my darling, if it will hurt—spoil—your life," said Mrs. Drew, turning deadly pale as she gazed wistfully into her daughter's deep eyes. "And there must be no shadow of untruth between you and me," she went on. "Do you not think that I realize how short life is—how little a casual—disappointment means? It all ends—under the turf or in the vaults. Mr. Macdonald fancies— No, I will not do him an injustice, Lilith—he loves me!" said Mrs. Drew, with determination. "Still he would soon get over it, and marry some one more suited to him in years. I have come to ask you what I shall do—whether I shall marry him or no. You are not to think of him—a man soon forgets—nor of me." She drew a deep breath. "A few days ago I would have rushed away—anywhere, if I had been told what would happen. Lilith, you must think only of yourself."

"I have been thinking—only—of myself," said Lilith gently, with a smile—but such a smile—the very ghost of every happy look which had ever crossed her face—a smile which her mother, who in her agi-

tation had turned aside, did not see. "And, when I think only of myself—mother—I recollect—that I am—my father's child."

Mrs. Drew looked round. She was puzzled—nor could she interpret the expression on Lilith's face or the curious ring in her voice as she said those last words.

"Well, when I remember that my father injured you so deeply, should I not be an unnatural wretch not to delight in anything that would make you happy? Willie will make you happy, mother. Oh, how I remember all our long talks about you, his castles in the air about our traveling together—to Venice—to the East! I did not understand then—and I do not believe he did either."

"You must not think it is a sudden freak," said Mrs. Drew, slightly alarmed.

But Lilith soothed her, and talked almost gayly of the future; then they went down-stairs arm in arm. Lilith was wound up; she was making a brave effort to forget herself, to control the heart-bitterness which urged her to cry out in her misery, to rush away and endure her passion of disappointment alone.

"I cannot bear this much longer," she told herself, feeling as if she would betray herself. It would be best to see and congratulate the man she had insensibly learnt to love, at once to accustom herself to the idea of his being her mother's husband now and for always. She hurried her mother to the drawing-room. The Rector was talking to Madam Ware and to Willie. He was grave, puzzled. He had meant to argue with his nephew against the marriage. But how could he talk platitudes to the buoyant, triumphant young man who was leaning against the mantelpiece, making, with his joyous smiles and gayety a sensible moral sunshine in the silent chamber?

"Ah, these young folks, these young folks, Rector!" Madam Ware had said to him, smiling and shaking her head. "There's no making them see difficulties. They forget they'll grow old by-and-by." Then she told her version of the morning's engagement.

"I wish I could congratulate you, Willie," the Rector said, "or rather congratulate Mrs. Drew. But"—then he calmly brought forward his arguments one by one. He had not finished speaking his unpleasant speech, to which Willie listened with barely suppressed impatience, when the door opened, and the mother and daughter entered.

"Not one word to her," Willie said in an undertone to his uncle; and there was a gleam in his eyes which warned the Rector to meddle no more.

Then Lilian went up to her old friend and pastor, and, taking his hand, said—

"Don't scold—or rather wait to scold till we are by ourselves."

"Godpapa must scold me," put in Lilith quaintly. "It was my doing. I told Willie a long-drawn-out tale about mother, a sort of 'Arabian Nights' story—only that it was all true; and, poor fellow, he wants her all to himself. But you must not take her away altogether," she said, turning to Willie. "We cannot any of us do without her."

She was so pale, her smile so forced, that Willie, while he spoke tenderly to her and tried to jest about the days in London, thought, "She is jealous of her mother's affection for me." But the Rector

read Lilith aright; and presently, after taking leave, he thought of Lilith—only of Lilith.

"That—child though she is—would have been a far more fitting match," he said to himself, his heart aching with pity for his strange, quaint godchild.

"If she had been prettier—and less gifted—she would have had a happier life perhaps;" but then, finding himself murmuring against the decrees of Providence, he checked his reflections, and began to wonder how he could smooth or quicken the painful life that lay before the brave young girl.

"What will they say?" he thought, almost with a laugh, as he joined his wife and daughters. "They thought it was the colonel."

As the Rector disclosed his news, Mary and Kate exchanged a smile. Each knew what the other meant. They had talked over the beautiful widow and her love-affairs, and had arrived at the conclusion that, as far as they were concerned, she was quite welcome to their Cousin Willie. Both girls had tacitly agreed that, if the colonel should happen to cast his dark eyes in their direction, either would consider it her duty to sacrifice herself.

Mrs. Rawson was Mrs. Drew's friend; so she contented herself with saying that there was no fool like an old fool, and that a "woman of Lilian Drew's age ought to know better."

"Ah, my dear," she went on, "it generally is you soft-hearted people who are all for charity and don't prate about justice who make fools of themselves! I feel convinced that, if I died, you would marry a ballet-girl or a cook."

"Well, I might do worse," said the Rector, teasingly. "The right couples never do seem to come together, somehow."

He sighed. Poor Lilith!

Poor Lilith was then lying prone on the grass in a far-away corner of the park. The rooks flew cawing over her head, the sunlight came and went as the clouds sped across the sky before the breeze which swayed the boughs of the great elms and stirred the tall fronds of the bracken. Willie—and her mother—lovers—man and wife! It was horrible—it was impossible!

What a life lay before her—to hide her hate of this unexpected union—to seem as usual, to sympathize, to play chorus to their wedded joy!

She felt as if there was no hope but in death; she thought of her art with a shudder.

"I shall never paint again," was the outcry of her young nature undergoing its first taste of the rack—"never, never!"

Then came a curious recollection, as she sat up and held her throbbing head tightly between her hands. Might not her torture now be an outcome of her father's sin? Had he not deserted her mother? Had he lived and died with his lawful wife, Lilian Drew? Lilith knew her mother well enough to know that no sorrowing widow would have surpassed her in consecration of herself to the memory of her dead, and that to be plunged into a new love such as this would have been impossible.

"I owe this to him," thought the girl solemnly. "Still even I may be suffering less than others by his agency." She had guessed who those children were, although she kept her surmises to herself.

"How can a soul be happy that has brought about so much misery?" she thought, wondering with awe where that poor soul could be in the universe—whether it were suffering also through knowledge of the suffering it had caused. It calmed her to think of the dread secrets of the infinite; she felt no resentment against that dead father, only a great sorrowful pity. "Poor soul!" she thought. "May God forgive him, as my mother has forgiven him, and as I do!"

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The colonel was staying at one of the older-fashioned West-end hotels. He had rushed across France, had spent a few days in Italy, and feeling the hot sun and the new customs and foreign chatter irritating rather than soothing, had gone on into Switzerland. Here the cold silence of the snow-tipped mountains, as well as the fir woods and the grassy meadows, recalled the Neilgherry Hills, the scene of his first short love-season. He wandered about the quiet valleys, and watched the goats browsing on the heights far above him. There, listening to the silvery tinkle of the bells in the stillness, he thought of his old love and of the new; he thought of his past barren bachelor-life and of the happy future he might spend with his cousin Lilian as his wife. He would be a father to Lilith and a son to the squire and Madam. Then, should he and Lilian have a son, the estate would really and truly pass on to the squire's own heir. Surely Lilian would consent—it was such a desirable marriage for all parties concerned!

Yet, even while Colonel Ware persuaded himself that he would shortly be an engaged man, he had his misgivings. He went in and out of the Swiss inns, and wandered so aimlessly about that he was called "the restless Englishman." At last he started for home all in a hurry, and, directly he arrived in London, telegraphed his town address to Mrs. Drew, adding—

"I wait to hear from you."

This was early; London was asleep under a pale blue sky; scarcely a smoking chimney broke the morning clearness of the summer air. Colonel Ware telegraphed from a central office, where the red-eyed night-clerk was just going off duty, and was surly at being detained; then he drove on to the hotel, where he waited for a telegram from Lilian, and revived an old and conquered habit of unlimited brandies-and-sodas and cigars. He had still the remnants of imagination hanging about his somewhat ordinary brain, had the colonel; for he fancied how he would open the yellow envelope and read, in that peculiarly careless and jaunty handwriting affected by telegraph clerks—

"Come to us as soon as you can"—or somewhat to that effect.

"I have a conviction that she will telegraph," he thought; so he lounged about the hotel in a vague manner, every now and then gazing out of the window and turning red when he caught sight of a telegraph-boy, as he did once or twice on that long summer day, during which he began to think the odor of soup and cutlets more disgusting than the odors of Eastern towns, and the street-cries and rattle and traffic of London the most wearying clamor he had as yet heard.

But no telegram came. That night he scarcely slept. Toward morning he had argued himself into a resigned mood; therefore,

when he was awakened by the man with hot water and one letter, he opened the one letter with composure.

"I thought so," he said to himself bitterly. "My luck!"

Lilian wrote—

"You would not accept my answer, dear cousin. How I wish you would never have spoken to me about any second marriage! How am I to tell you what has happened? Let me begin by reminding you of our conversation the evening before you left us. We were speaking of love; and it was while we were speaking, I think, that I felt that I dearly loved some one, and that this some one was not you. At that moment, if I could have been told who that some one was, or what would happen, I would have gone away —anywhere—I know that! But he came shortly after, and he has asked me to marry him, and I am pledged to do so. When I think back upon it all, it seems sudden, rash, but irrevocable. I dislike writing this to you, dear Geoffrey, because I think you will despise me for my weakness; but, remember, you are my nearest and representative relative after my parents, therefore I rely upon your countenance of this engagement. If you really intend to marry, you will find so many better, prettier, and younger wives than myself that I almost congratulate you on your escape. I am always

"Your affectionate cousin,

"LILIAN DREW.

"P.S.—His name is William Macdonald."

At first the colonel had a good honest fit of disgust; he was disgusted all round—with himself—as he saw his bronzed face and short gray hair reflected in the glass, he could have throttled himself for what he called his "idiotic folly"—with Lilian, for being such a fool as to be in love "at her age, with a grown-up daughter"—with Heathside Hall and the Rectory, for having cajoled him into a silly state—with France and Italy and Switzerland, for not having cajoled him out of it—in fact, with the whole world.

Then came the inevitable reactionary mood. His feelings of the last few weeks were reversed; he began to think that bachelor-life in London was rather a good sort of thing in its way. He ordered his luncheon with epicurean care, then he went to his neglected club—the East Indian—and met one or two old cronies. He dined there, and afterward played whist, winning largely.

No man, however rich, objects to victory at cards. The colonel pocketed his winnings with a pleasant sensation that, while cards remained, all joy in life was not yet over. And, as he strolled back to his hotel through the quiet streets, he said to himself, "Lucky in cards, unlucky in love," and that perhaps it was better to cling to cards. You could always leave off playing cards; but, if you had a wife and children, you could not rid yourself of them, however much bother they might be. "I don't suppose they could make up a whist-table within a half-dozen miles of the Hall," was his concluding and consolatory reflection as he re-entered the hotel, and the night-porter told him that a gentleman had called who seemed very anxious to see him.

"The card is on ur table, sir," he added.

When the colonel reached his room, he found it, and read, "William Macdonald, Prince's Square, Bloomsbury."

On the back of the card was a penciled message—

"MY DEAR SIR,—I am sorry not to find you. Will you make an appointment to see me? Yours, W. M."

The colonel retired to rest, declaring to himself that he would have nothing further to do with his Cousin Lilian, or her future husband, or her affairs. But during the night he dreamed of the old place. He dreamed of Madam Ware, then the sweet young mother with the baby Lilian in her arms, sitting on the tabouret in the quaint old drawing-room at the Hall; he dreamed of the sweet-smelling hay-loft, and of tumbling in the hay—of his childish escapades, chasing frightened rabbits, defying the turkey-cocks, charging among the sheep—all the jolly-boy-days at Heathside; and, when he awoke, he told himself that there should be no more folly, and that he would be son and brother rather than nephew and cousin, but that all evanescent "nonsense," as he chose to call it, should be smothered there, then, once and for all. He wrote a kind little note to Lilian—

"MY DEAR COUSIN,—Of course you can rely upon my 'countenance,' such as it is. Let me know when the wedding is to be. I am too old to be your groom's 'best man;' but I shall hope to be present. Who are your trustees? I will be one with pleasure.

"Yours always, GEOFFREY WARE.

"N.B.—Love to all."

The first time the colonel had surrendered was when he was a subaltern, and had to follow the lead of his superior officers. Then, as he gave up his sword, he had felt a choking in his throat. On the occasion of this second and more graceful surrender he felt a similar sensation.

"All that is over," he said, as he sealed his letter with his signet. "Now about this fellow"—taking up Willie Macdonald's card. "The affair is sudden. H'm—I think I ought to look him up and see that Lilian is well done by. It is my duty."

So he took a hansom, and in a quarter of an hour was in Prince's Square. The family were at luncheon, the butler informed him, as he showed him into the library. He had scarcely glanced round at the grim old room with the rows of ancient volumes and the one long window commanding a view of the narrow black back-gardens, when Willie Macdonald came in. He looked radiant, glowing. He came forward with a half-deferential, half-apologetic air, and warmly shook hands with the man whom Lilian had confessed to be a rejected suitor. There was a slight awkwardness between them at first; but before ten minutes were over the colonel had rallied from his semi-vexation, and they began to talk of the approaching marriage. This was to be in a short time, before the autumnal weather set in.

"Lilian does not believe in showers of wet dead leaves upon a bride," said Willie; "and I am bound to acquiesce in so innocent a superstition"

Then he asked Colonel Ware if he would be his "best man" and trustee to the marriage-settlement.

"The last, with all the pleasure in life," said the colonel; "but for 'best man'—well, the bridemaids wouldn't thank you to introduce an old fogy like myself. No; ask one of your younger friends."

"Somehow I have an objection to any but old friends at a family gathering," said Macdonald. "However, there is plenty of time to think of minor details." Then he asked the colonel to come upstairs and be introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Law and to his mother; and the colonel, full of forebodings as to the future, followed him.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Do you happen to remember meeting a young man on the P. and O. steamship 'Olympia,' of the name of Druce, a few years back?" asked Willie Macdonald of Colonel Ware, as they went up the staircase of the house in Prince's Square, past the old window-seat with the blue cushions. "If you do not"—for the colonel, after searching his memory, shook his head—"he remembers you; for he said, 'By Jove, if it isn't Ware!' when you got out of the hansom, while we were at luncheon."

"Druce, Druce?" repeated the colonel. He fancied that he remembered the name.

"A young painter—lives in Paris. Seems to have a name for tropical landscapes. They are certainly very fine, if a little wild in color," said Willie. "I showed him a sketch of Lilith's, and he thought great things of it. Ah, there he is!"

The drawing-room door opened, and Mrs. Law came out, followed by a tall young man. He was neither fair nor dark. His skin was tanned, his eyes were a dark hazel, and, when he tossed aside a thick crop of straight hair of a brownish neutral tint, they gleamed or shone in the light. As he saw Willie and the colonel, he drew back; but Geoffrey Ware recognized him as a young fellow-traveler who had greatly interested him on his journey outward to India some years back.

"You were but a lad then," said he to Druce, after he had spoken to Mrs. Law, "but an enthusiastic lad. You were a painter even in those days. Ah, we must meet again, and talk over old times!"

There was a half shyness, half sentimentality about this young artist which sometimes clings to the disappointed. He told Colonel Ware, as they stood talking on the staircase, how it was he did not live in England. Every one had seemed to discourage his natural views of color. He had displeased masters, critics, and students in the legitimate or accepted schools. That he had failed in getting his pictures into any of the exhibitions went without saying.

"But from the moment I set foot on foreign soil everything was changed," he said, in a voice which was slightly affected by foreign pronunciation. He had found a painter in Antwerp to give him encouragement. Having means of his own—his father had made a comfortable fortune in India, and had been an old friend of Mr. Law's—he went to Munich, to Düsseldorf, and other art-centers.

"And this year his great Nile picture has a conspicuous place in the Paris Salon," said Willie.

Then an appointment was made for the colonel to visit Druce's house and to see some paintings he had with him, and they parted.

Here was the old drawing-room, with the great family portraits, the slim gilt furniture, the faded tapestry. Mr. Law, pale and white-haired, sat in his corner near his table of Indian curiosities. Mrs. Macdonald was in a low chair near him. The colonel, as he glanced round, thought these surroundings scarcely conducive to sentiment. When he saw Macdonald to-day—the ordinary fair Englishman—he did wonder at Lilian Drew's "infatuation." He could have understood her falling in love with a Byronic personage, or even with a young man like "that young Druce, for example." But he failed to detect the charms of his rival.

Old Mr. Law first mistook the colonel for the squire, then for some other gentleman. His memory was beginning to fail, his eyes to dim. He had been very ill, and was kept from conversational blunders when Mrs. Law, more tyrranical than ever, was in the room. But, when she was out of his presence, he would grow brisk and make up for lost time.

Now he did so with a vengeance. After he had shaken the colonel's hand for a whole minute, and had asked after numerous personages in India, many of whom the colonel had never even heard of, or who had been dead and buried for years, he suddenly inquired about Lilith.

"Ah, my poor dear little girl with the black eyes!" he said, shaking his head. "How is she? She used to be good to me, poor thing!" Then he went on in a loud whisper—"Fond of Willie there—never apart, those two weren't. I never was so surprised in my life—"

The colonel reddened; but fortunately Mrs. Law, who was speaking to Macdonald at the other end of the room, came up and said sharply—

"What's that you're whispering about? You must not pay the slightest attention to anything Mr. Law says, Colonel Ware. No sooner is my back turned than he begins talking nonsense."

"I was not talking nonsense, my dear—"

"If you will talk immediately after your luncheon, the blinds shall be drawn down, and we shall leave you alone to take a nap," said Mrs. Law determinedly; upon which the old gentleman was silent, and only blew his nose in mute expostulation, and blinked wistfully at the colonel until he took his leave

This the colonel did soon. For Mr. Law's remark had impressed him uncomfortably. Lilith was a mere child; but she had grown up rapidly, and looked and behaved as an older girl. What if she had really "fallen in love," as girls call it, with the young man who was shortly to become her step-father?

"I consider it highly probable," the colonel assured himself. "And, if so, I should consider it my bounden duty to talk to Lilian upon the subject. It would have been a far more fitting match, that of Lilith and Macdonald. But the idea of the mother and daughter loving one man is revolting."

He would find it out on the day when Macdonald and he visited

Druce's studio. Even then there would be time. He, for himself, did not believe in the broken hearts of widows on the wrong side of thirty, and would have no scruple in the matter.

The next few days he amused himself well enough. His luck at cards continued. His partners smiled, and the old gentlemen at the club who divided their time between dining, dozing, and the card-tables were not eager to be his adversaries, although they liked watching the play and seeing their friends count out their gold pieces on the green cloth. The colonel did not either think of Lilian by day or dream of her by night.

Then came Willie one morning to fetch him to see young Druce's pictures. The bridegroom-to-be had been very busy choosing furniture for a pretty little villa-cottage on the river-bank a few miles out of town, the home he intended to make over to his wife as his marriage-gift. Some feeling that, by insisting upon Mrs. Drew's acceptance of him when she might have married a husband who not only was richer, but who would be the possessor of Heathside, he had wronged her in a worldly sense, had led him to wish the colonel to see this little estate. So, when Colonel Ware remarked that it was hardly necessary to have brought a carriage with so fine a pair of horses to drive to Fulham and back, Macdonald said—

"Ah, but I wanted to drive you on to see Lilian's little villa!"—and he explained his wedding-present, which was to be a surprise.

The colonel was scarcely in a humor for "loves and doves," as he inwardly called Macdonald's talk, still he felt that as Lilian's trustee—she had gratefully accepted him as such—he was bound to see what her future husband was doing for her.

"Of course I must go," he said dryly, "although I had an appointment with General Blackett at the club at one." Then he looked at his watch.

"Well, we need not stay long at Druce's," returned Macdonald; "and his studio is hardly a stone's throw out of our road."

Then they talked over the settlements and other business, till the coachman turned sharply out of the main road into a lane where there was no stone pavement, where trees flanked the walls of square gardens, and the houses, few and far between, were of all sizes and shapes. They stopped before a square red-brick house half hidden by trees. This belonged to Druce's mother.

She met them at the door, a pretty little old lady in black satin, with a high cap and a huge muslin collar, and with a deep courtesy informing them that they were welcome, led them into a drawing-room still quainter in its bygone fashion than either Heathside Hall or the house in Prince's Square. For Mrs. Druce was a Frenchwoman by birth, and as Mademoiselle d'Arigny, the daughter of a Royalist emigrant, had preserved her affection for the taste and style of the time of the Louis monarchy. She had recovered some of the furniture and china and family portraits, most of which had been destroyed by the Republicans when they sacked the Château d'Arigny; and the gilded chairs and Venetian mirrors and crystal chandeliers, the soft, if faded, carpets and embroidered satin curtains, which were so carefully arranged in the curiously-shaped room that seemed all corners and embrasures, brought back past days, and therefore made the venerable lady happy. Her son,

Louis Michel, was the one child of her middle age. She spoke of him, as she spread her skirts, with dignity, slight little being though she was; and she entertained the colonel and Willie Macdonald seated on a sort of dais under the stained-glass window which completely hid the lane from the occupants of the drawing room.

"My countree has applauded my son," she said, as she folded her withered delicate hands upon her lap: "therefore I am satisfied, content. Not that I not like your England! It is the country of my deceased husband. It gave my family a retreat from the wicked men of France who hated the Bourbons. But the wicked men are but the naughty children of our dear France, and they only make her good children love her all the more."

Then Druce, the Anglo-Frenchman, came in. He wore his white painting-suit. He looked bored, or sad. Still he welcomed his guests with a sort of careless grace.

"I have been putting my pictures in the best light," he said, "and my mother has been preparing breakfast; so I hope you will stay."

He looked as if he did not personally care whether they stayed or not—except for his mother's sake. He had been so little with her these past years, and he was her one darling. Even his friends—ah, even his acquaintances—were delightful to her because they were his! The colonel noticed his glance, half tender, half respectful, toward his mother, as he said, "I hope you will stay;" and he felt an instant liking for Druce spring out of the old passing fancy that his young fellow-traveler had inspired him with years before.

"I want to see your pictures very much," he said, rising; and he spoke with a warmth which was absolutely honest.

Then the two men, somehow infected by the atmosphere of respect that surrounded the queenly old lady, bowed low—a homage she acknowledged with a dignified little bend of her head—and followed the young painter from the room.

The staircase looked un-English with its padded velvet balustrade and the fantastic flower-pots of hanging creepers on gilt brackets against the walls. Then they came to a landing where there was a *prie-Dieu* chair placed beneath a huge crucifix, and on either side the portraits of Mr. Druce, senior, and his French Royalist wife, painted by their son.

"Juvenile failures," he said, with a wave of the hand.

A few more stairs were mounted, and they were in the studio—two attics thrown into one—a fair view of the river winding among the pleasant suburbs from the windows in the sloping roof, the whitewashed walls hung with old shields, spears, dinted bits of armor, and unframed sketches, a skeleton hanging in the corner by the side of a lay figure.

"I give them flesh and blood," said Druce, with a smile, as he drew a curtain that hid the ugly pair. "Here is my latest embodiment of our friends yonder."

He took a canvas from its leaning-place against the wall. It was the picture of a girl feeding doves; she sat under an olive-tree, with one white-feathered creature clasped to her breast. She was a fair girl in peasant dress, her downcast face shaded by a curious head-dress. There was an effect of purity about the figure, with doves

busily feeding at her feet, with one bolder pigeon perched on her knee to peck the grains from her apronful, with another just alighted upon her shoulder, his wings still unfolded, while his neck was craned as if for his bright eyes to peer up into her face.

The colonel and Willie Macdonald admired this, Druce's picture for a French exhibition; then the painter said abruptly—

"Now I will show you what I paint for your academy. If they reject me, I do not care. They rejected me before and will no doubt do so again; so I give them a picture that I like—my sky, my favorite trees, my favorite subject, my ideas of beauty. If they reject —very well. But, if they accept, then—do you not see, Monsieur le Colonel?—they accept me, my views, my ideas, my coloring—then I triumph!"

He turned the canvas on the large easel in the center of the room. The picture made two distinct impressions, one upon Macdonald, the other upon the colonel.

Willie Macdonald saw a dark young man in the tight Italian dress of the middle ages, with the short cloak, seated carelessly upon a stone bench under laurel-trees. The trees were greenly black against a vivid sunset, and the dark rapt face shone in the refraction of this intensely golden light.

The colonel noticed the face first, with a sensation of recognition. Most people know the feeling—"I have seen that face before." This was an oval dark face, with eyes almost thrilling in their black intensity under straight-marked brows, the nose slender, but pronounced, the corners of the curved lips drooping—scarcely with fear —rather with a passionate discontent or yearning.

"It is more like a woman than a man," said the colonel somewhat sharply, because he was annoyed that he could not at the moment remember whose face so strongly resembled this. "May I ask who was your model? I believe you artists generally paint from models."

"I have seen some one like that," said Macdonald musingly. The more he gazed at the expressive face the stronger grew his recognition.

The young man smiled. Then, in his careless way, he said there was no secret about the impersonation. The picture would be called "Day-dreams"—a young Italian poet dreaming poetry, with some beautiful heroine as its theme. But the face was a woman's. Then he related how, one autumn day in Rome, he had seen the beautiful young Marchessa di L—— seated on a stone seat near a fountain, with her little brown *bambino* and its nurse.

"The group was so delightful that I hid myself behind a tree and sketched it," he said. "The nurse you have seen—that girl feeding the doves. The *bambino*—well, all *bambini* are much alike. The marchesa I have painted here."

He took the canvas and put it aside. Then he showed them sketches of the far East—temples, palm-trees, arid sands, with camels as frontispiece; then jungles, with the magnificent overgrowth of plants in the moist red haze.

Then there came a sharp knock, and a withered little old Frenchman, a mummy-like mannikin, announced, in very French-English, that breakfast was served to the gentlemen, and Druce led the way down-stairs.

The dining-room was small, and sparely furnished, as French dining-rooms are. There was a pleasant view of green shady garden, with straight-cut box-trees and yews, with statues in green alcoves and a fountain playing in the center of a small grass-plot.

Druce sat opposite to his mother at the circular table, and his guests were on either side. The breakfast and its appointments were in keeping with the old French manner of the house and its proprietress. Cutlets were served with purée of potatoes in delicate china. Then followed fowl and salad and a chocolate cream; while the only liquids were claret, water, Burgundy, *café noir*, and Chartreuse. The little old butler joined in the conversation now and then respectfully, but as one of the family, and it seemed a matter of course to the mother and son. After the meal, Colonel Ware and Willie took leave, the old lady accompanying them to the door and standing there while her son, bareheaded, followed them to the carriage.

"It is like a chapter out of some old French romance—that house," said Macdonald.

"The young man is a genius—there is little doubt of that," remarked the colonel. He was about to add something about Lilith, when he stopped short; he had suddenly recognized that the face of the Italian poet had reminded him of Lilith.

His throughts came so quick and fast that he hardly knew what he thought. But, as they drove rapidly through the suburbs toward the village on the river where the villa was, he began to arrange his impressions. Supposing that Lilith had been attached to Macdonald before he proposed to her mother, it might be only a childish affair. The colonel was no match-maker. But it struck him as curious that young Druce's ideal of beauty should remind him of Lilith, who was considered ugly.

"Do you consider Lilith ugly?" he suddenly asked Macdonald, who wondered at such an odd question. His thoughts were occupied with chairs and tables and carpets and curtains.

"Ugly?" said Willie. "Well, you see, we who know her are more occupied with her cleverness and odd ways. I imagine she must have been an ugly child. But she is softening, and some persons might admire that Eastern coloring and outline."

"Evidently our friend Mr. Druce does," remarked the colonel dryly, watching Macdonald. If the man had ever had any idea of caring for the girl more than as her mother's daughter, he thought, he would show it now.

"Druce?" Willie looked puzzled.

"Did you not notice that the face and head of his ideal Italian beauty might have been painted from Lilith?" asked the colonel. "Of course he has added a masculinity, squareness, and angles instead of roundness and curves. But it is Lilith all the same."

"I do not see the likeness," said Willie, still feeling puzzled, and slightly resenting the colonel's bringing Lilith into the conversation. Some hints dropped by his aunt, Mrs. Law, since his engagement to Mrs. Drew, had made him uncomfortable when he thought of his great friendship for the young girl so soon to be his step-daughter. But he had dismissed his misgivings with the assertion to himself

that Lilith was so completely a child that she could not have cared for him except as a girl cares for an elder brother or a youthful uncle.

"There is such a strange coincidence in this young man's tastes being similar to that child's, and his thinking her peculiar style beautiful, that I feel I should like them to know each other," observed the colonel. "I dare say I am like an old woman; but old bachelors sometimes get into the way of meddling with young people's affairs."

"But Lilith is a child; her mother looks like a girl," said Macdonald, reddening.

"She is quite old enough to be unhappy, living in the same house with you two," rejoined the colonel; "so I think it will be a good thing to give her something to think of."

"She has her art," said Macdonald.

"So has Druce," returned the colonel. "All I want is for him to be asked to the wedding."

"Most certainly," said Willie, a little ceremoniously. Then they drove on.

The colonel approved of the miniature house, with its large garden, good stables, and poultry-yard.

"But there is no room for Lilith," he said, smiling. "She must stay at the Hall—until she marries."

Willie explained, as they drove back to town, that at any moment his uncle might die, and he would come into his property.

"Dead men's shoes!" said the colonel bluntly.

These two meant to be cordial: but somehow they irritated each other. However, it was arranged that Druce was to be invited to Heathside. The colonel asked the young man if he would go. At first Druce wrote four pages of excuses; but he ended by giving way, his one stipulation being that no one was to be told he was a painter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was the end of August. A few days before the wedding Mrs. Macdonald was to visit Heathside Hall. Mrs. Law had of course been urged to "assist" at her nephew's marriage, but made Mr. Law's weakness her excuse for not seeing William "throw himself away upon a middle aged widow with a grown-up daughter," as she told her particular friends.

The bridegroom was to meet Colonel Ware and young Druce at the railway-station, and the three were to journey to Heathside together. It was a bright breezy day; the colonel, who was ever to the fore where actual arrangements were concerned, had secured a first class compartment. Willie was in gay spirits. The colonel had made up his mind not to be that undesirable thing, a "wet blanket," and in determining to be jolly had become so. As the train steamed through the beautiful country, and his companions talked cleverly and amusingly, "Michael" Druce, as he preferred to be called, felt suddenly glad that he was with them, glad that he was to make one of a hearty English home-festival.

He had expatriated himself. He had felt the fascination of Southern scenery, of the Southern temperament—that curious mix-

ture of liveliness and melancholy. He had taken part in Northern festivals, had clinked glasses with reckless Heidelberg students, and had waltzed with pretty peasant-women at the village fairs. He had dreamed mediæval dreams in quiet monasteries, where he had made friends with the monks and had left many a fresco or panel to attest his passing visit. He had wandered about Rome, had grown morbidly disgusted with his era among the desecrated remains of beautiful Athens, and had spent one whole week in the desert spoiling canvas after canvas in vain attempts to reproduce the mystic, unfathomable expression of the great stone face of the Sphinx. In these different spots of earth he had thought strange thoughts, and had felt still stranger emotions. These had left him restless, unsettled, with but two unchangeable feelings—his love for his mother, in which his French blood showed itself, and his resentment against England, or rather the painters of England, because they would not own him as one of themselves.

This repudiation of him had been the bitterest pill he had had to swallow. After all, England was his fatherland. The passionate, eager young artist had felt as desperate when England was cold to his burning productions as if his dead father could have said to him, "Go—you are none of mine." Strange that to-day, on this unexpected journey to take part in the wedding of a man who was a comparative stranger to him, he should almost have forgotten that his country and he were not at one, that, instead of decrying the simple garden-like sweetness of the rural counties he was passing through, he felt a new recognition of their peaceful beauty. He reveled in the noble stature of the great trees dropping their golden leaves on the sward or the golden stubble, in the warm tints of the woods, in the winding streams and the quaintly-shaped pollards, in the rustic homesteads with their fertile fruit and flower gardens, with their droves of sleek cattle and atmosphere of plenty and of content, and in the villages, with their little churches and green graveyards—"God's acres."

"This man has a corner in his heart left for home, after all," said Willie, after Druce had remarked with unconcealed warmth upon the swiftly-passing landscape. "That is where we English can never quite settle down abroad, colonel, unless we carry our home with us, or pretend that we do by making a stage for ourselves in their houses, and acting being English upon it. But till Druce has seen our squire and madam and the Hall I shall not ask his opinion of England."

"Nor till he has seen the Rectory and your cousins and the dairy," added the colonel. Then he sounded the praises of the Rector, his family, his house, garden, orchard, farm, *et-cætera*, till Willie smiled, and he, seeing the smile, reddened to the roots of his short gray hair.

"Enthusiasm is infectious," he said, hiding a certain confusion and annoyance at Macdonald's quiet little smile by busying himself with a cigar. "But why should we not allow ourselves to be enthusiastic sometimes?"

"Ah, 'life must not be all painted in sepia and Indian ink if we want to be happy,' as Lililth once said to me, poor child!" said Willie; and he sighed—he did not know why. He was happy

enough. All was going smoothly. He was traveling to make the woman he passionately loved his wife. Yet with the sudden recollection of Lilith's little saying came the remembrance of her curious face, with its wistful look, and he had unconsciously added—"poor child!"

Somehow the name "Lilith" was a check to the conversation. The colonel coughed, then smoked in silence, and Willie took up a newspaper. Druce looked curiously at them. Who was this "poor child" who was named after Adam's first wife? He had little time for pondering. The train pulled up—it was the station before Heathside; and during the next few minutes his traveling companions were busily changing caps for hats, bundling papers into the pockets of their dust-coats, and tumbling their paraphernalia upon the seat nearest the door. Then there was a jerk. Willie let down the window; a smart groom came hurrying up; and, after passing through the station, where the officials saluted the bridegroom with a new sympathetic deference, Druce, following the colonel, saw a four-in-hand brake, with a ruddy gentleman on the box reins in hand.

"Hulloa! All right?" The squire was in a capital humor. "Come along!"

The colonel introduced his young friend.

"What? A cross between a frog and a bull?" he said, with a compassionate look at Druce, who was pointing out his luggage to the servants. "Poor fellow! There ain't no good in such cross-breeds however. Here, Mister—Mister—wedding-guest, come up here, and you and I'll have a talk going home. All right behind?"—looking back to see if Macdonald and the colonel were in.

"All right," said the colonel. So they were off, tooling along the road—the beautiful road with the arching trees and their picturesque shadows lying upon the grassy hedgerows.

The next time, thought Macdonald—the next time he would pass along this road Lilian—his wife—would be with him. It was a thrilling thought; there was even a solemnity about it. But no fear crossed his mind—no thought of a shadowy hand that might come between his and hers and sunder their wedded clasp—no misgiving even of what was to come, what harvest of bitterness was in store.

Meanwhile, as the team of brown horses dashed gallantly along, snorting and arching their necks as they rounded corners or sped straight onward homeward, Druce felt as if in a soothing dream. The squire reminded him of the men in the hunting-pictures he had come upon in old village inns; or he might be one of Fielding or Smollett's country gentlemen in the flesh. Druce liked him at once—indeed he was fascinated by the good-humored old face with the jolly double chin and bristling white eyebrows, by the unction of Squire Ware's bass voice, whose tones were oily enough when he was not "in his tantrums." And he listened to his talk, although the squire sympathized with him for being a hybrid, and comfortingly assured him that he would "get over it in time—the bull would swallow up the frog," with other encouraging, but somewhat mystifying speeches. Michael Druce was in one of his dreamy meditative moods. He was hardly nervously alert enough to seize the exact meaning of words or gestures; he was passively receiving

impressions. For many a long day he would remember Heathside park as he saw it that morning—the masses of feathery green, the bracken on the mossy turf, the fragrant silence under the solemn spreading beeches, the golden sunlight searching through the wide boughs and quivering as it played in broken bright patches upon trunk, bough, white road, or grass; then the massive gray walls of the Hall appearing suddenly as the horses trotted round a curve in the road.

"You have a typical English mansion," he remarked to the squire.

"A sound old house, sir—stone—none of your gimcracks, your foreign lath-and-plaster," said the squire, gratified, as Madam Ware appeared at the open door and smiled upon her guests—"not a stone that isn't what it looks. No nonsense about us anywhere. A good hand-shake, and a slice o' beef and a mug o' home-brewed. And madam there, as good and kind a soul as ever breathed, barring her deafness; but she'll hear you safe enough, if you speak slow and don't bawl at her."

Druce had alighted from his high perch, assuring the squire that he would remember his instructions.

"Now mind you don't holloa!" called out the squire, as the young painter found himself mounting the broad flight of steps and following Macdonald into the cool darkened hall.

He was introduced to the gray-haired quiet little lady, who told him, in the hushed, cautious tones of the deaf, that she was pleased to see him, holding his hard thin hand between her soft white palms as she turned to Willie Macdonald and said—

"Lilian wanted to have tea in the parlor; so we are sitting there. Your friend must forget he is a stranger, Geoffrey, and take us as he finds us."

"I am sure he will," answered the colonel.

He looked a little stern; he could not forget that he was arriving here as the rejected suitor of the bride, although he was her cousin, the future head of the Ware family, and her trustee. As the three men followed their hostess along the narrow passage leading to the "parlor," he felt he would be glad when this first meeting in these changed circumstances was over.

Madam Ware opened the door, and Michael Druce saw the long, low, old-fashioned room with the great cupboards and oaken flooring, the simple wooden chairs, the wide bay-window, all green with the view of the orchard and park beyond; he heard soft laughter and sweet voices; he saw two figures standing together close to him, one a fair woman in white, with a bunch of roses at her breast, and golden hair and soft blue eyes, who looked so happy as she welcomed him with a few kind words that he suddenly felt alone and dull and stupid, in comparison with her, as she walked away into the corner and stood with her back to him, talking to Macdonald.

His painter's eyes were attracted by the attitude of those two. Each line, each curve, each fleeting facial expression meant content, hope, happiness. He sighed as he turned away, and saw a pale girl with great passionate dark eyes, dressed in black, plucking impatiently at the necklace of amber beads around her long brown throat. She startled him—this tall creature with the mass of curling black hair. Surely he had seen her somewhere before? As he was won-

dering and puzzling himself, watching her as she stood against the background of the great sofa and the green outside the open window, the colonel bending over her, Lilith was fighting with a new sharp pain. The bridegroom was here. The wedding was inevitable. Had she doubted it? Had she hidden the fact that William Macdonald was all but her step-father already from her mind? If she had —during these quiet weeks that her mother had been her constant companion, never tenderer, sweeter, or more solicitous for her child's happiness—poor Lilith had not known it till now. She did not look at Willie and her mother, she did not hear their low-voiced happy talk—she felt it; and those minutes were hard to bear in quiet.

"What are you talking about?" she said to the colonel impatiently. "There is such a noise I cannot hear." And she plucked at her beads, and flashed an angry look at a meek man-servant who was arranging the tea-tray on a small table at the window.

"I was telling you about my young friend over there," answered the colonel gently. If a girl or woman had spoken to him like that on an ordinary occasion, he would have felt wroth; but, interpreting Lilith's irritation aright, he not only felt compassionate, but had a sense of satisfaction in that his surmises about Lilith's liking for Willie were correct. "He is a pleasant fellow; clever too—traveled."

"What does he want with us then?" asked Lilith, wrestling with an inward rage. "We are neither pleasant nor clever, nor are we traveled—"

"Druce, allow me to introduce my Cousin Lilith to you," said the colonel peremptorily, beckoning Druce. "She looks a great deal more ferocious than she is, I assure you."

Lilith flushed up as she and the young man bowed gravely to each other. But she did not resent her cousin's speech, which had somewhat roughly reminded her not to betray her emotion, whatever it might be.

So she occupied herself with pouring out tea, while the rest talked —all except Druce, who stood aside, hardly taking part—more as a spectator.

This was a new scene to him—the English old lady, so sedate and dignified, yet so different from his stately little French mother; the young matron, Lilian, fair, radiant, full of grace, so charming, so lively, yet without a loud tone in her happy voice or a tinge of excitement in her gentle gayety; the English lover, with an air of proprietorship in his future wife, this beautiful golden-haired widow; the military cousin, British in every look and gesture; the endless cups of tea dispensed in the old Chelsea cups by that black-haired, black-browed, black-eyed girl, the one incongruous figure in the picture.

What was she? How did she come to be one of these? The colonel had not talked about Lilith to Druce just because he had intended the two to be friends. So Michael had somehow connected his fleeting ideas of her with the pretty bride. He looked from Lilian to Lilith, puzzling; it did not occur to him that they were mother and daughter.

The colonel was parting his hair very carefully before the glass,

later on, when there was a tap at his door, and, in answer to his "Come in," Michael Druce entered in evening-dress.

"I suppose I am right?" he asked, glancing at his toilet. "It is your English fashion."

The colonel nodded, and went on with his parting, while Druce moved restlessly about the room, looking at an old Dutch picture over the mantel piece, or out of window into the park.

"Who is the young lady in the black dress with the amber beads?" he asked the colonel presently. "I—fancied—I—had seen her before; and yet—I have thought and thought and cannot remember where."

The colonel, inwardly amused, gravely explained Lilith's identity.

"She is the daughter—of that young—lady."

Druce was astonished.

"Then—her age? She looks a grown-up young lady, does mademoiselle."

"Ah, we will not enter into the mystery of ladies' ages!" said the colonel. Then he related Lilith's painting experiences; Druce listened attentively.

"There is no doubt she is a painter," he said decidedly. "I must persuade her to talk to me."

"But I thought you did not wish any one here to know you were an artist?" questioned the colonel mischievously.

The young man, who looked what Colonel Ware inwardly called "much less heathenish in evening-dress," explained that on his reception into the family circle he had felt embarrassed, *de trop*.

"She looked at me with those great black eyes of hers as if to say, 'Who are you? What do you want here?'" he explained. "Perhaps, if she knows who I am, she will not think so much of an intruder."

"Ah, your artist's imagination is at work!" said the colonel. "However, tell Lilith you are a painter, by all means; it was not I who advised you to appear ashamed of your profession. Oh, yes; that is actually what it amounts to!" he went on, seeing that Michael was about to expostulate. "If I went anywhere and called myself Mr. Ware, it would seem like being ashamed of being a soldier. Hoist your colors boldly, and stick to 'em—that's one of our English mottoes; and, put into practice, it pays."

Then they went down-stairs to the big drawing-room. As they entered the great room where long sunset rays of red lay upon the Turkey carpet and the ancestral portraits looked gloomily out from the shadow, the colonel saw that Lilith was half hidden by one of the heavy satin window curtains.

"Wait a moment," he said to Druce, who was about to join the group at the other end of the room. Then he went across to her.

Lilith was gazing out into the garden; she was dressed in black and yellow, a dress made out of Indian silken stuffs that Mr. Law had given her one day when Mrs. Law had gone a short distance out of town to visit some old friends. The colonel said a few words in praise of her costume.

"Although I must acknowledge that there is a suggestion of the wasp about it," he added. "However, the sting will be waiting, will it not?"

He asked her, with a tinge of seriousness, to be amiable to the stranger guest.

"But I don't know what to say to young men," said Lilith impatiently—"especially ordinary young men."

"Do not look at poor Druce so disdainfully," whispered the colonel, "or, I assure you, you will be sorry." He paused a moment, then asked her if she remembered a picture of the Nile that hung in the back drawing-room at Prince's Square.

Lilith gave him a searching look with her wide black eyes; she wondered at this curious leap from subject to subject.

"Is Mr. Law going to give it to mother as a wedding-present?" she asked. "She liked the picture very much, I know."

"Did you like it?"

Once more Lilith gazed curiously at her cousin.

"What does it matter if I liked it or not?" she said. "If mother is to have it in this new villa they are everlastingly writing and talking about, I don't suppose it will make much difference to me—I sha'n't be there; I shall not leave my grandmother, colonel—you may depend upon that."

"That is not the question," rejoined the colonel. "My question was, did you like that picture? 'Yes,' or 'no?'"

Lilith hesitated a moment.

"If you so particularly want to know," she said, "I can't say either 'Yes' or 'No.' The truth is that picture worried me—it had such a glorious atmosphere. If you went at any time, in any light, and stood before it, you almost felt the steamy fragrant heat, you reveled in the shade of the palms, you watched the hues of air and water as if they were real, instead of in a picture. Then you went upstairs and loathed your own daubs till you longed to fling them down into the old garden and make a bonfire of them."

"Oh, dear, no; I did not!" the colonel broke in.

"I said 'you' only figuratively," said Lilith, who had been betrayed into rhapsody, and subsided at once into the self-contained manner she had adopted of late. "You will allow that it is vexatious to be absolutely outdone in anything," she added, in excuse. "I was always trying and failing in what the painter of that picture excelled in; I tried everything all round."

"You wanted him to show you how he did it, or them, or whatever it is; I know nothing of art-jargon," said her cousin, who was getting thoroughly amused by the situation. "Perhaps you would like to know him?"

Lilith looked gravely, seriously at her cousin, as she sometimes looked at her grandfather when he joked after dinner and she did not quite appreciate his jokes.

"I don't know what you mean," she answered. However, she soon found out.

"Druce," said the colonel—and the young man joined them—"explain all about that misty red picture of yours that hangs in Mr. Law's back drawing-room to my Cousin Lilith here, will you?"—and he went off.

Lilith looked aghast. Michael Druce felt awkward, ashamed. First they stared at each other; then they both said something—stopped short.

"I beg your pardon," said Lilith, blushing.

"No; you speak first, mademoiselle," requested Druce, with a little bow.

"I thought the painter of that lived in Paris."

"So I do."

"But you are an Englishman—at least, we thought so by what my Cousin Geoffrey said."

"So I am."

"I do not understand," said Lilith, mystified.

At that moment dinner was announced, and the elders were pairing off; Willie and Lilian were going from the room.

"Come along, you two young folks!" called out the squire; and Druce offered his arm to Lilith.

"It is very amusing," thought the colonel, as he followed them, giving his arm to Madam Ware. "They looked at each other like two tom-cats an hour ago." Now, as they went down-stairs, their heads were bent; they were in close converse.

The awkwardness of the introduction once over, the two became friendly and at ease with each other. Druce enjoyed that little dinner at Heathside Hall, before Macdonald's wedding, better than he had enjoyed anything for a long, long while. He told himself that he was thoroughly interested—interested generally in this thoroughly old-world English home—interested particularly in finding a fellow-artist in the young girl of the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

After dinner, Lilith and her mother wrapped themselves in woolen shawls and sat out on the terrace. Presently the men joined them to smoke; and Madam Ware was coaxed out to sit in her easy-chair. Coffee was served on little tables. The air was warm, the clear dark blue overhead was studded with stars; the scent of the flowers in the marble vases mingled with the fragrance of the coffee, the pungent odor of the cigars.

"This is even better than Italy," said Druce, in a low voice to Lilith.

The word "Italy" struck a chord in his memory. As if by magic, he seemed to see the group in the Italian garden—the fair pretty nurse, the clambering *bambino*, the young Marchesa, with whose strange dark beauty he had suddenly fallen in love—as deeply as a young man of the poetic temperament can fall in love with a being he may not approach or hold any sort or manner of converse with, who indeed, with the probability of never meeting again, seems almost as fleeting and unsubstantial as a dream.

He knew now—Lilith recalled the Marchesa. It was the same aquiline outline. As she sat by him, her great eyes searching vaguely into the dark-blue vastness above the poplar-trees, it was the same rapt, wondering look that told of a longing unsatisfied mind.

"If my mother could only see her?" he thought innocently, as he watched her, almost with solicitude. It was his somewhat French idea to share all his admirations with his mother—at least,

he explained this and that beauty to her, and she strained her sympathies to see and to feel as he did. "She would say as she said of my Tasso—'There one sees the living soul,'" he thought, as he unthinkingly asked Lilith what she saw there in the sky.

"Nothing," said Lilith brusquely, for she was startled. Those vague regrets that the past was gone, that the present and the future were what they were—these were confronting her from the still dark horizon.

Druce was repelled. He got up and strolled to the end of the terrace; Willie and Lilian were there. A peal of soft laughter made Lilith thrill with a sense of loneliness.

"My fate to be alone!" she thought bitterly; "then, as she saw her grandmother walking feebly toward the open windows, her heart reproached her; she sprung to her, and lent her the help of her strong young arm.

"At least they will be left me," she told herself. She would never marry; she would stay at the Hall, and strive to be more and more to the squire and madam as they waxed weaker and more dependent upon others.

The next day the lawyer arrived, and there was a little ceremony—the signing of the settlements. Then Lilith, who thought she had annoyed the young painter, for whom as an artist she had almost a veneration, meekly asked his assistance to cut flowers for the house-decoration and for the arch they were erecting in the park; and they spent a sultry morning cutting and hewing off blooms, huge and little, and laying them in great clothes-baskets, which were carried away by the oldest boys in the village school; then they joined the schoolmaster and the boys at the arch. Druce was on a ladder, nailing up branches which Lilith handed to him, and they were all very busy and merry, when a thunder-shower came pouring down; there was a smart clap of thunder, and a general rush to the house. Lilith and Michael raced; but, before they scampered in at the hall door, they were wet to the skin.

How it was neither knew; but from that moment all ceremoniousness of manner, all the "misters" and "mademoiselles" were over. Michael and Lilith were like boy and girl. Their hilarity affected the others. It was a merry luncheon-party at the Hall that day. Even the staid family lawyer unbent and laughed and talked like an ordinary individual. There was a discussion as to whether their programme for the afternoon—tea at the Rectory—could be carried out. The colonel declared it could.

"I have set my heart on showing our friend there my idea of an English clergyman's home," he said.

At that moment into the room came a broad stream of sunshine; so presently the ladies put on their bonnets, and they started, a walking party of five—Willie, Lilian, and the colonel in front, Lilith and Michael following. The greensward was thirstily drinking the grateful rain, faint mists hung about the leaves, lately so hot and dry, now gleaming wet. The fern-fronds glittered with thousands of tiny drops. Michael and Lilith noticed all the loveliness of the freshened land. As they gained the Rectory lane, they delighted in the soft aromatic odor of the earth, in the peculiar sweetness of the honeysuckle. The nut-trees and the blackberry-bushes gave

forth a faint scent—as it were a foretelling of their fruiting. Then came a breeze toying with the hay-wisps left upon the hedges by a wagon they heard toiling on in front. It was more than a picture, for they could smell and touch as well as see; and there was an inner satisfaction in hearing the birds chirping to each other, the crack of the wagoner's whip, the heavy steps of the cart-horses, the cows lowing in the Rectory meadow, and the cheery voices of their companions who were walking on ahead, which made Michael feel joyous—he knew not why.

The party in front waited for Michael and Lilith at the gate of the Rectory fields. Just before this gate was reached, the winding lane sloped upward between its high overgrown hedges. The smiling picture, hidden by the hedge on Druce's right, burst upon him unexpectedly—the smooth slopes, green after the rain, the purple hills in the distance, the patches of woodland, the clumps of graceful trees, the Rectory building and the bailiff's picturesque cottage in its leafy garden hard by, and the brook that meandered through the fields and went rippling through the Rectory orchard.

"How different," he began.

"From France?" asked the blue-eyed bride, with a little sigh.

Even now the suggestion of foreign countries recalled her griefs, and, casting a shade upon her face, restored some of its former pensiveness.

She, the heroine of the moment, and he, the young Anglo-French painter, walked onward together. They were the first to reach the garden gate, and, after walking between the overgrown lavender and fuchsia bushes, to enter the narrow passage of the Rectory. A cuckoo came out from the little Swiss clock and announced three quarters. Mary Rawson, dressed in pink, with sweetwilliams in the muslin folds of the kerchief at her fair neck, came out from the dining-room, stopped short, then, with a disappointed glance at Druce, welcomed them.

"But the rest?" She looked anxiously toward the door. "I thought Lilith and the colonel were coming."

"Here they are, my dear," said Mrs. Drew, as the three came up the garden path, the colonel last.

The colonel was silent, and his face was red. As the Rector and little Mrs. Rawson came out and they all went into the tiny drawing-room, he complained of the heat.

Willie and Lilian were lingering in the open doorway—indeed the Rectory reception-room seemed crowded with its few guests, and noisy with their chatter. Still it was cool and pleasant—flowers in pots and vases everywhere, all the furniture in spotless holland, fresh feathery asparagus in the grate, the tiny tables laid for tea, with the Rector's old family silver and his wife's china. Michael Druce felt perfectly at home here at once; he liked everybody and everything. He carried the tea-cups for Mrs. Rawson, who had already felt that there was something remarkable about this young man with the sharply-outlined square face, the unmanageable crop of hair, and the luminous eyes. While admiring those soft pink-faced English girls, Mary and Kate, and thinking the Rector, with his handsome gray head, his resonant voice, and his neat black garb, a wonderful model of a British pastor, he had eyes and ears princi-

pally for Lilith. He knew where she was looking, what she was doing; and, as she sat there, silent, he wondered what she was thinking of. But he would not ask her again point-blank, as he did last night on the terrace. He would cultivate her acquaintance and try to gain her friendship.

"There is something mysterious about her, something hidden, something misunderstood," he thought.

Disliking the commonplace, the idea of gradually learning to understand this exceptional girl was a new interest.

Lookers-on proverbially see the game more fully than the players. The pair in the doorway were no exception to a well-proved rule. Lilian, as she leaned against the door, smiled to herself as she noticed the colonel, his elbow on the mantelpiece, bending over Mary Rawson, talking, while Mary was looking up into his face; and, as she saw Michael Druce hovering about Lilith and stealthily watching her when he thought himself unseen, she felt a new content, a sweet sense of relief. She would not confess to herself what she had feared about Lilith; but she knew that to see a possible admirer of her loved child in this clever attractive young man was delightful to her. She gave a little sigh of joy as she looked up at Willie with the earnest confident expression that was the index to her complete surrender to her future husband's will, and asked him, almost with childish amusement—

"Do you see?"

Her smile failed as Willie, who looked bored or annoyed, replied somewhat shortly—

"We will talk about it by-and-by."

"Oh, no," she said, with a sudden misgiving—"not by-and-by; let it be now! See—they are going to the farm. I heard the colonel speak to Mrs. Rawson about it. Let us go into the garden."

Willie looked abstractedly toward the door leading to the garden, then at the little company within. They were all standing about somewhat undecided. Then the Rector came to the lovers and asked if they would care to go round the farm.

"Colonel Ware wishes his young friend to see what we have to show him," he said. "But surely you two don't care to go?"

"I am going to pay my farewell visit to the garden and orchard," answered the bride; and presently, after the little company had departed, and the sound of their cheerful voices was growing fainter as they crossed the fields in the direction of the farm-buildings, she turned to Willie, and said, "You will come?"

He had been looking grave and moody, for him; but the sight of a well-remembered pathetic, wistful look in Lilian's eyes recalled him to his present self.

"Anywhere with you, darling," he answered almost sadly. "I hate interfering with your pleasure, Lilian; but the fact is, I am anxious about Lilith. I do not like that young man's manner to her; you know I am—or I shall be directly—responsible for her."

"What do you not like?" asked Lilian—they were traversing the graveled path that led through the laurel plantation to the Rector's orchard. "I saw nothing to find fault with."

"My dear"—Willie spoke with sudden energy—"where are

your eyes? That Druce's flirting, or attempting to flirt, with that child—that mere baby."

"Lilith is scarcely a baby, or a child," said her mother softly, though her shell-like little ears grew crimson. "I cannot say that I disapprove of the young man's behavior; I suppose Lilith must fall in love and be engaged and married in due course, just like other girls?"

"But not now, not at her age. Lilian, if you can bear to see her innocence, her thorough ignorance of all that is vile and mean in life, spoiled, I tell you I cannot—and that is the truth," replied Macdonald. "We must protect her—you and I." He drew his future wife's hand affectionately upon his arm. "You know so little of the world in its present phase, dearest, you must let me judge for you. Lilith to have a premature love-affair would mean Lilith's future being spoiled irrevocably—and you know she is a genius."

He said much more upon the same subject, so calmly and reasonably that Lilian felt comforted and repentantly horrified at the wild idea that had crossed her mind—that Willie had once cared more for Lilith than he knew or suspected.

"It is so easy, so terribly easy, to mistake one's own feelings," thought the poor bride, who remembered how she had loved this man who was to be her second husband—ay, and devotedly, passionately—before she even knew that she preferred him to the commonest, most ordinary acquaintance.

They were in the orchard; Lilian's dress swept the long grass under the trees. The boughs were laden with fruit; the sky was blue between the fluttering leaves.

"We must not go on—the grass is wet," said Willie; so he led his Lilian back, across the rustic bridge that spanned the busy brook, swelled by the rain, back into the garden. He chose a seat in an arbor near the drawing-room windows and began to smoke.

"If they choose to look out for us, they cannot accuse us of being anything but prosaic," he said, as he lit a cigar and lounged in a wicker chair opposite to one Lilian had chosen. "They cannot say we are giving them a bad example."

Lilian laughed, although she felt strangely sad. Then they talked, first of their own affairs, then of the colonel.

"I think he likes Mary very much," remarked Mrs. Drew.

"Well, you ought to be glad that he is consoling himself for having lost you," said Willie. "I do not think that, in his place, I should have been so easily comforted; however, in this erratic world one never can tell."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Drew. She heard footsteps in the drawing-room. "In this miniature place you can hear from the roof to the cellar, and *vice versâ*."

But the masculine voice was not the colonel's. Both listened to its rising and falling cadence. Whoever the owner of the voice might be, he was talking earnestly, enthusiastically.

"I expect it is that young fool," said Macdonald presently. He was leaning back in the chair, his arms folded, looking superciliously from between his half closed eyelids. "He is holding forth about art to the girls."

At that moment the voice ceased; and Lilian, looking up, saw Lilith come to the window, look out vaguely with her peculiar dreamy stare, and say—

"Poets are right; you are right. There is a feeling we don't understand, Mr. Druce; but it comes but once."

Then she moved away from the window, and the rest of her speech was indistinct.

"There," said Willie impatiently, throwing away his cigar. "If you wanted proof positive that what I said was right, you have it. Talking sentimental stuff of that sort to a mere child! I have no patience with it! Let us go in."

They found Lilith, Kate Rawson, and Druce.

"Mr. Druce did not fall in love with the prize heifer or appreciate the pigs," said Kate; "and he was so languidly interested in seeing Mary take the butter that I had compassion on him and brought him in."

"Ah, you three are kindred spirits, you see!" remarked Willie, with a peculiar smile; then, feeling ashamed of his captious humor —for which he could not have accounted—he made an effort, and at least seemed his own cheery self again.

He had not attached any particular importance to Lilith's talk at the window; but the girl's earnestly-spoken words haunted her mother all through the moonlit walk back to the hall and the restless night she spent afterward, all through the succeeding days of wedding bustle, till the climax of her disquietude was reached on the very morning of her wedding-day.

Awakening in the gray dawn, her room full of solemn gray shadows, all without and within the hall hushed, even the birds in the great trees outside in the park, still slumbering, she questioned herself and tortured herself with remorse for having accepted happiness selfishly, until at last she actually wept herself to sleep again. Then she had a peculiar dream.

She dreamed that that day was not her wedding-day, but Lilith's. She saw Lilith in the very bridal dress which Willie had insisted on choosing for herself—ivory satin and old lace. The two were standing before the altar in Mr. Rawson's little church, where she and Lilith's father, Captain Drew, had been made man and wife seventeen years before; there were her bridemaids standing behind Lilith, the squire in a new blue coat with brass buttons giving Lilith to be married to Willie. Then she turned suddenly and confronted her dead husband, living, and looking as he used to look in the old days before he deserted her for the fashionable actress; and he gave that old careless laugh of his, and kissed her cheek with that light half-scornful kiss she had felt to be more bitter than had he merely nodded to her; then he said, "Let us make it up, Lil. We are quits now; I loved another woman, and you have loved another man."

With the horror of that speech she awoke. Mary, the maid who had been with her through those long years of trouble, of solitary widowhood, was bending over her; she had brought her mistress's breakfast, and, hearing her moan in her sleep, had roused her.

Mrs. Drew, barely awake, sat up, stared around her, then cried—

"Oh, Mary, I have seen the dead!"

"What a lucky dream, ma'am!" said the practical Mary, draw-

ing up the blind of the window nearest to the bed, and letting a stream of sunshine fall full upon the glistening satin wedding-gown that was laid out upon a sofa "As sure as you dreams of them poor dead and gone things"—Mary spoke as she might have spoken of the dead leaves the gardener was sweeping up below—"so sure the living's a-occupying themselves about you. Come, ma'am—you really have overslep'; and Mr. Macdonald's been up from the Ware Arms and all on the fidget to see you; but Miss Lilith's got the message."

Here a joyous laugh came up through the open window.

"There she is!" said Mary, going to the window and opening it. "Miss Lilith, your mar's awake, miss; so you may as well come up."

"All right!" came up from below.

Then there sounded a distant clanging of bells—cracked bells, but rung with such a good will that there was an infectious joyousness about their music.

"They've been at those blessed bells ever since six o'clock," went on Mary. "But little wonder! They've a grand dinner cooking at the Ware Arms; and the little 'uns are to have one too, for squire went down yesterday afternoon and arranged it all at the school. Ah! it isn't all the weddings that'll give as much pleasure as yours, ma'am!"

Here Lilith came in. Her white bridemaid's dress was becoming to her. Her mother looked at her admiringly; and, as she looked, all anxiety, doubt, as to Lilith's happiness fled away.

Lilith had brought a box of white roses—wreath-sprays.

"My 'papa,'—as Mr. Druce will persist in calling Willie—begs you will wear these," she said. "We bridemaids have bouquets of them. It is very nice of him," she went on; then she kissed her mother, and the two had a little talk.

Mrs. Drew soon discovered the cause of her daughter's elation. Michael Druce had been persuading her to paint a picture for the Paris Salon. He was to help her with it.

Nothing could have strengthened Lilian more or better than to see Lilith happy; and to go through that wedding-day required a certain amount of physical strength.

First came the racket of arriving guests, then bridemaids tapping to come in, and hovering round the bride, all excited anxiety to take part—any part, however small—in the adorning business. It was very pleasant and complimentary; but—as Lilian thought, while one flourished a brush and another played with the comb, while a third fair damsel stood like Patience on a monument with elevated arms holding the veil, and a fourth was at her side watching with desperate earnestness for the right moment to come to hair-pin the wreath to the bride's coils of fair plaits—it was not an easy matter to get dressed at all; and the actual dressing was accomplished after the colonel, who was self-constituted master of the ceremonies, had fetched each bridemaid and stowed her away in her rightful corner of her distinct and proper vehicle. After seeing one depart, he had mentally totted her up as disposed of for the moment, and had gone off upstairs to fetch and get rid of the next, almost with the deter-

mined persistence with which a dog-mother changes the whereabouts of her pups.

Then the bride and the squire and madam drove away through the now deserted quiet park to the old church; and, as Lilian alighted and walked under the lime-trees on her father's arm, the organ began to play, and in her heart she felt that Heaven would bless her and her husband.

Then came the ceremony. The church was crowded with friends and neighbors, who had put on their gayest and best to show how cordially they wished some brightness of life to the lady who had been so meek and patient under wanton ill-treatment. The same spirit seemed to animate all present. The Rector read the Marriage Service with sympathetic good will. The old clerk said his "Amen" with honest emphasis. The bridemaids and wedding-guests were fluttered with the natural delight felt by the better part of human nature in seeing the deserving crowned, or the corner turned of some hard and desolate life. Then Willie, as bridegroom, was so manly and earnest that all doubt, fears, perplexities melted away; and, as she knelt by his side, his wife, Lilian Macdonald, felt safe.

The signing in the vestry, the congratulations and embraces, were over. Willie and Lilian were alone in the carriage. Macdonald took a long look at the gentle happy face under the veil; then he raised the veil, and, taking his wife to his breast, told her that, as far as Heaven would permit, such sorrow and trouble as she had known, could not, should not come near her again.

"For I shall be your shield, darling wife," he said; "and, as I said before, whatever grief may reach you must pass through my heart first."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Lilian. At that moment she remembered her dream, and shuddered. "Why talk of the past or the future? Let me be happy now—now," she said, almost feverishly, "while I can, while no one can come between us."

He soothed and comforted her. Then, hand in hand, they talked—not of themselves, but of others; of the old people, how they could divide their time among them; of Lilith and her idea of exhibiting a picture; and of those unfortunate children who were constantly in Lilian's thoughts. Willie had an idea about them, he told his wife, which he would talk over with her later on.

Thus they began the unselfish life they meant to lead together till death. Thus they averted the utmost fury of the storm which was slowly but surely gathering, unseen, unsuspected.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE wedding-day was an affair of the past. Yet the breakfast and the speeches, the departure of the newly-married couple, the tea and ices and croquet and flirting afterward, and the dance in the big marquee in the park at night, made pleasant talk for the young people of the neighborhood for weeks after.

The colonel, in fulfillment of a promise given to the bridegroom just before he started, left the Hall, accompanied by Michael Druce, next day.

"I don't say that by and by I should have any objection to the young fellow," Macdonald had said. "But I do not think it advisable to have him hanging about here now. Lilith is too young."

"You are quite right," the colonel had agreed.

So, on the day after the wedding, guests, flowers, festal decorations, carriages, and white horses vanished. Lilith was alone with her grandfather and grandmother in the silent old Hall; and, but for the confusion in her mother's room, where Mary was struggling with masses of tissue-paper and piles of cardboard boxes of all shapes and sizes, all that remained of the new-made Mrs. Macdonald's *trousseau*, but for the half-dismantled arch and the trodden gravel and the cart before the door which was being filled with dead flowers and withered evergreens, the wedding might have been a dream.

Lilith had not danced. Michael did not dance. They had sat apart in a corner of the marquee talking. Michael had much to tell—of his travels, his adventures, and from the talk he drifted into confidences. He told Lilith of his first childish longings and dreams of the future, of his disappointments when he first began to draw and paint. His experiences had been harder than hers. Her heart throbbed with sympathy. She understood it all so well.

"You have been through that sort of thing yourself—you know what it is," Michael said.

Lilith disclaimed. The idea of comparing herself with him!

"You are a great artist; I am only Lilith Drew," she said naïvely.

Then Michael spoke so warmly of her talent, was so really enthusiastic, so interested, so hopeful of an artistic future for her, that she took fresh heart. The next day, when he said good-by, he made her promise to work, to begin a real picture of her own composition to send to some exhibition.

"As soon as we are gone, take a walk, observe all you see, and, if you cannot make up a picture out of what strikes you most before you return, then you are not a born artist—that's all. But I know that you can—you will."

Lilian went out. She had to go to the village to see some bedridden old people peculiarly protected and cared for by Madam Ware.

The village was quiet, all the neat cottages seemingly deserted. The men—and some of the women too—were out working in the fields; the elder children were at school. As she was looking about for the materials for a picture which the young enthusiast had urged her to find, she heard a child cry. A baby had strayed from a cottage, and had tumbled over. An older child rushed out and picked up the chubby urchin, who had only his little white shirt on. Here was her group. She sketched it in pencil, went home and drew it on a canvas, then worked on steadily during the next few weeks from the children themselves. Their mother was only too pleased to lend her children to Miss Lilith every day.

If complete happiness in her work was a convincing proof of Lilith's genius, it was there. During those weeks she was perfectly content. When she thought of her mother and Willie, it was with pleasure that they were as happy together as their letters home unmistakably showed. When she thought of Druce, it was with in-

terest and gratitude; but she did not wish to see him till she had finished her picture to her own satisfaction.

With Druce it was otherwise. He had gone home wildly, madly in love for the first time in his life. He had met his ideal—not only in external appearance, but in natural character. He told himself that Lilith's brusqueness was truth and simplicity combined. She was open as the day, innocent as a baby; there were depths in her heart and soul which would be known only when the great day of her life came—when she loved. He had vague hopes that, while he was restlessly chafing and yearning to see her again, she was longing to see him.

"Such love as mine cannot exist unreturned," he told himself, with one of those delusive arguments bred of unreasoning passion. "Surely she must feel something—however little—of all this! Distance is nothing between souls."

Then he watched eagerly for a letter; but no letter came. He grew pale, and looked gloomy. Mrs. Druce feared that he was bored with London, that his wandering fit was on him, and that, as had been his wont, he would come into her room early some morning, say that he was "off," embrace her affectionately, and remain away for months. She tried to find out if he was in love, and with whom; but he evaded all her little *ruses* to betray him into a confession.

"If it is love this time, it is serious," the old lady said to herself.

She could not understand "Michel's" preference for the society of those old ladies at Prince's Square and the elderly colonel. "Michel" was always inviting the colonel to breakfast. She cross-questioned the colonel with much deftness, but learned—nothing.

Meanwhile Michael was trying to get a second invitation to the Hall. This was transparent to Colonel Ware. He was under a promise, so he took upon himself to warn Mrs. Macdonald not to be an unconscious *postillon d'amour*.

"The lad has got his distemper badly," he said to that lady. "It may blow over, or it may not. In any case, it is not our business to interfere."

So Michael Druce found Lilith's friends and relatives above being cajoled, although perfectly amiable and glad to see him.

Another month passed—no letter from Lilith, no news of her. He grew desperate, and took a somewhat desperate step. One morning he went down to Heathside, and boldly presented himself at the Hall. He was taken into the drawing-room, where Madam Ware and Lilian, just returned home for a short visit, were sitting. They seemed surprised, but were kind. He was asked to stay for luncheon. He saw Lilith's picture, which made him more in love with her than ever. But Lilith herself was "out"—they did not say where. He tried to find some excuse for lingering "to see Macdonald," who had gone to the market-town. But he could not stay without the invitation which the ladies were evidently disinclined to give. He took leave, and went with a heavy heart toward the station.

Lilith had been to lunch with Mrs. Fyres, the good-humored doctor's wife, with whom she was very friendly. She had tried hard since her mother's return to settle down to the new relations, the

different position; and to a certain extent she had succeeded. But she was in turns low spirited and querulous; and, being aware of her discontented mood, she went out more than usual, that she might not let her ever-beloved mother suspect in the faintest degree that her gayety was feigned.

This afternoon she was returning slowly and wearily to the Hall. She was in a humor when she saw no beauty, no goodness, in anything. Nature, human beings, all seemed persistently to show her the worst aspect. The poor child, who was making a brave struggle, felt herself a hopeless pessimist. Then in the shrubbery she suddenly came upon Michael Druce. At first startled, she received him somewhat coldly. He seemed out of place there, as she then felt.

At first he talked vaguely, wide of the mark. Then he suddenly changed. They had come nearly to the end of the shrubbery; he had turned back and accompanied her. In a minute the Hall would be in sight, and separation inevitable. If he spoke at all to-day, it must be now.

Agitated, pale, he plunged into the subject.

"You and I are not like other people," he began. "I believe you know already—"

Then, in vehement passionate words, he told her how he loved her—how he had thought of nothing else since he saw her last—how he was wearing away his mental and physical strength because he could not see her—how he would have her for his love and his wife, and would defy every obstacle existent or to be created between them—in fact, he spoke with the strong will and burning passion which are irresistible to an unappropriated heart wanting an owner.

But Lilith's heart was not empty, not untouched. So the more furious he grew, the less she liked him, till she even felt a species of disgust and aversion for a man whose talent she had almost worshiped.

She tried to be kind. She would promise any friendship, any liking; but beyond that she was obdurate. The more he pleaded, the colder she grew. At last, in despair, he saw his mistake. He begged her forgiveness, accepted her sisterly friendship, and went away sorrowing.

And she returned home at once, chilled to the very core of her soul and in the fiercest passion. For she knew the truth. She knew that she had loved Willie Macdonald, although she loved him no longer; and she felt that he at one time had nearly loved her—therefore that in some way he was guilty, punishable.

"But I wish him no ill," she said to herself honestly. "It is better as it is." Then by degrees her good thoughts brought about a great sympathy for Michael Druce.

"We seem destined to imitate each other's lives," she thought, with a sad smile. "Well, we sympathize; but as to marrying any one one does not love—that is contemptible."

Love and marriage seemed an epidemic just then. But a few days later the colonel came down and announced his engagement to Mary Rawson.

There was a quiet wedding; then Colonel and Mrs. Ware and Mr. and Mrs. William Macdonald went abroad for the winter.

They asked Lilith to accompany them, promising that Mrs. Macdonald would take her place at the Hall. But she refused.

Then came a lull, a dead calm, while the whirlwind was at hand that would scatter hopes, intentions, poor petty human plans, as the hungry north wind scattered the dry snow that covered Heathside park the greater part of that quiet uneventful winter.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WINTER was over and forgotten. Spring had come and gone. The fresh breezes and green leaves which had brightened London had made way for sultry heat and foliage withering copper-colored on the black boughs. On one of the hottest days of late July a funeral started from the house in Prince's Square—an old-fashioned funeral—black cloth, nodding plumes, great black chariots, mutes. All that was left on earth of old Mr. Law went to Highgate Cemetery with the full pomp of the ancient *régime*. Mrs. Law sternly resisted the proposal of her brother, Mr. Rawson, seconded by her nephew, Willie Macdonald, her husband's heir, for maimed rites. She would have neither abridgement nor modification.

It was a melancholy funeral. Mrs. Law, as she stood by the grave, was rigid, stony, self-possessed. Mrs. Macdonald was there, looking worn out after her exertions as night-nurse. Mr. Rawson looked tired and sad. As Willie gazed down into the yawning hole, a robin, perched on a tree close by, began to twitter mournfully. Willie's spirits sunk. His life had of late been flooded with sunshine. At this moment he seemed to see his Lilian and the beautiful babe, a fair little son, recently born to them, from across the grave

While he supported his aunt, the new-made widow, across the turf, while they made the silent journey home in the dungeon-like black carriage, the words rang in his ears, "Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain." "He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."

These and the robin's song haunted him also throughout the luncheon, where the widow insisted on assuming her place at the table, and he sat opposite to her, carving for the small party, who seemed unable to speak above a whisper, and throughout the reading of the will, in the gloomy library at the back of the house. "He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them," he muttered to himself, as, the reading of the will over, he found himself possessed of a capital far in excess of that he expected his uncle would leave, a fortune tempered only by a charge of life-interest to be paid by him to the widow.

He went to his aunt, who was sitting bolt-upright, her black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes, and said a great many kind dutiful things. Then, as he found he could not get her to listen, he embraced his pale mother, and urged her to accept the general invitation issued by all in authority at Heathside Hall for her to go to them as soon and stay as long as possible.

But, while he was trying to comfort the women, while he was ac-

cepting the congratulations of the lawyer and the family physician that his affairs, through the wisdom of his late uncle, were placed on such a highly desirable footing, he felt that he was acting a part, that he was chilled, scared, miserable, that all this was unbearable to him, and that he had forgotten, almost suddenly, how to hope, how to be happy.

He got the Rector away as soon as he could. Taking his arm, he hurried him along the side of the square, and into the first hansom they met; then he drew a long breath.

"Thank goodness, we are out of that charnel-house!" he cried, with a shudder. "Uncle, what is there in death to paralyze us who are in life? I assure you that, while I stood by that grave and saw that coffin lowered, my heart seemed to freeze slowly in my body, my blood to run cold in my veins."

"There are worse things in this world than death," said the Rector—"in some cases, life."

Turning abruptly, Willie saw the Rector's eyes fixed on him with sadness, solicitude.

"What is it? There is something wrong!" he exclaimed, in consternation.

"My boy, you are nervous," said Mr. Rawson, with as much of his genial collected manner as he could gather together and assume at the moment. "There is nothing exactly wrong. Only a trouble has come to me connected with a trust. I too, standing at poor Law's grave just now, felt as if I would willingly change places with him and not be called upon to face the next few weeks—or possibly months."

"Trust? My dear uncle, that means money." Then Willie, roused by his uncle's seeming ill-luck, talked and urged and begged and entreated him all the time they were speeding homeward in the train to let him only know what amount he might require—it was more than at his service.

"Ah, my boy!" said the Rector, sadly, "there are gulfs in one's life that no money will fill in or bridge over; and I fear this may be one of them. But do not let me cast my burden upon your young shoulders," he went on, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "You want all your brightness for dear Lilian, for the babe, for Lilith too. By the way, I asked the colonel to come for a night; I wanted to see him. Perhaps we shall find him at the station."

Willie leaned back, but partly reassured, and thought long and deeply as they sped through the beautiful county now so dear and familiar to him. His forebodings had not been actually empty sensations. What could this "gulf" in the Rector's life be which no money could fill in or bridge over?

He could not imagine. In any case, he said to himself, glancing at his uncle's handsome profile, at the firm-set mouth, at the short silvery hair, with a new sympathy and liking, he and Lilian would stand by him, and by all of them—ay, and by the sharp-tongued Mrs. Rawson—to the end.

Willie had always felt kindly and generously to any who were "under a cloud," even when so by their own doing. But, since his marriage with Lilian, that quality which he disliked to recognize under the term "philanthropy" had increased in him. As

the train drew up at the station, he looked even more anxiously than did Mr. Rawson for the colonel's stalwart figure. Colonel Ware was there, pacing the platform and looking bright and energetic.

"You two look as if you had been to a funeral," he began. "But what means this sudden summons, Rector? Mary was so disturbed by your telegram, in spite of your 'all well' at the end, that I have just wired to her to save her further anxiety."

Mr. Rawson said a word aside to him, and any one watching the colonel would have seen a change of countenance in the gallant soldier with the empty sleeve. Then the Rector turned to Willie.

"Not one word of my affairs to Lilian," he said, in an undertone.

Then he asked if Willie could come round to the Rectory, should he and the colonel require him.

"We may want your advice," he said. "Who is that in the pony-chaise waiting for you?"

"Lilith," answered Willie.

Then the three went down the steps and talked to the young girl, who was at home for a month to join in the baby-worship—for no young Bacchus had more frantic followers making contortions and uttering strange cries than this young Geoffrey Macdonald, the colonel's godson. Lilith was fast losing her ugliness, or rather her angularity and swarthiness were developing into a peculiar beauty which might be caviare to the multitude while being caviare to the epicure in art.

"Madonna is well," she said, in answer to Willie's anxious look. Lilith was painting her mother and the babe as a Madonna and child, and she and Willie had come to call her this. "She was a little sad this afternoon when we read the funeral service together, and she sent baby right away for a walk—I believe because he should not hear the word 'death.' But she is cheerful again now."

Willie sprung into the carriage, took the reins, and, nodding to his uncle and the colonel, drove off rapidly.

Then the colonel turned to Mr. Rawson.

"What is this all about?" he said. "Will those pests never leave us alone?"

The colonel, although he had not won and married his Cousin Lilian, had not relinquished his interest in her affairs. As trustee with the Rector to her marriage-settlement he had acted in concert with him when the affairs of Captain Drew's three illegitimate children were to be arranged. The boy was at school; the girls were still with the lady who first agreed to take charge of them. A fortnight previously their actress-mother had died a quiet painless death in the house of a humane country doctor who lived near Ilfracombe. The doctor's wife had nursed the unfortunate invalid—whose death would be a considerable pecuniary loss to the worthy couple—tenderly through her long illness to the end.

"What is this fresh demand?" repeated the colonel, for the Rector was walking silently toward the fields leading to the Rectory.

"Demand! Would to Heaven it were a demand!" said the rector emphatically. "Ware, just as I was starting this morning I received an anonymous letter to inform me that that woman hoaxed us all, that Drew is not dead, but that he went mad, and is alive at this moment in some lunatic asylum in Italy."

The colonel stopped short; this was a shock—at first. Then he turned to the Rector.

"I don t believe it!" he cried. "Absurd—untenable! The woman was immoral and a fool; but she would not have died with a lie upon her conscience!"

"She may have said this, and have sworn Doctor Hale and his wife to secrecy at the last moment," said the Rector. "Heaven knows! It is an awful blow; at first it unhinged me so that I could scarcely meet it, lie or no lie."

"Well, it must be met—ay, and dealt with at once," declared the colonel sternly, striding along the path with a determined step. "Each moment lost is a wrong to Lilian. Good Heaven, till we have proved this thing a lie, what is she? What is her child?"

The Rector gave a faint groan. This anonymous statement of a rumor might be some malicious act of some enemy of Lilian's or of Willie's, or it might be what it professed to be—truth. He felt he ought not to be unmanned, timid; but he was not so young as he had been, and, disagreeable shocks generally do manage to deal themselves at the worst moment for the recipients, so had this.

"What are we to do?" asked the Rector helplessly. "How can one fence with an enemy in ambush? And how are we to prove a negative? Search all the lunatic asylums in Italy? Why, it will take months!"

"Bah!" said the colonel. "The way is as plain as a pike-staff. Who received the news of his death?"

"General Drew. But he died last January."

"Then we must find his executor. Of course he received some certificate or trustworthy documentary evidence of his son's death."

"He was an old scamp! I wouldn't trust him."

"Scamp or no scamp, he would hardly be party to such a fraud. Even supposing that he let the news of his son's death pass without verifying it, we have other ways and means of getting at the truth. We must see this doctor and his wife at Ilfracombe, and find out whether the woman ever hinted at her husband's being alive. Meanwhile we must employ detectives in Italy, or wherever he died, to find witnesses of Captain Drew's death—first of all, its entry in the parish-register. If dead, he must have been buried, and there must have been more difficulty than usual about getting him underground, he being an alien and a Protestant in a Catholic country. My dear Rector, there are absolutely no difficulties in proving this report a lie."

"Ah, but if it should not be a lie?" said his father-in-law. "Such things have happened, worse luck! The woman may have been goaded to tell the lie in the hope of bettering her position, of getting more sympathy from the relatives when they were softened by the fact of Drew's being dead—over and done with forever, as far as this world is concerned—than she could hope for as the wife of a lunatic who might recover, be at large, and sponge upon them again."

"Well, I am not going to judge. First of all, I must see the letter," said the colonel, as they neared the Rectory.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was a sweet dewy evening after the sultry day. The rural homestead, covered with climbing roses, looked as if nothing but peace could possibly stay within its white walls. The trees leaned protectingly toward the thatched roof; two doves were cooing and preening their plumage near the chimney-stack, from which the blue smoke rose in a steady column, for the next day would be "baking-day," and they were heating the large brick oven.

The Rector looked at the house and sighed; he thought of the narrow grave he had gazed into but a few hours since, and he said to himself, "Perhaps it is better to be there, unconscious of sin, misery, and suspense, than even here." Of the Hall, of the squire, madam, Lilian, he had not had the heart to think since that awful threat of mischief to those—his dear friends—had met his eyes.

He took Colonel Ware through to his study, drew up the blind, then went to his escritoire, unlocked it, and silently handed the colonel a letter.

The direction was in clumsy printed characters. So was the inclosure, which was a half-sheet of note-paper. The colonel frowned fiercely as he read.

"To the Rector of Heathside.

"Sir,—I beg to inform you that Captain Drew, the lawful husband of the squire's daughter of Heathside, did not die, as reported, last year, but is still alive and in a lunatic asylum in Italy. This is from A WELL-WISHER."

"A hoax!" said the colonel vehemently. "A hoax on the face of it!" He turned the paper over and over. There was neither address nor date. "There is 'E. C.' on the envelope," he said—the postal districts had been recently established—"and that is all the clew the rascal who penned this has chosen to give us. There is neither stamp of the maker's name nor watermark in either paper or envelope," he went on, holding them in turn to the light. "The wretches knew what they were about. By the way," he added, returning the papers to the Rector, "what became of those old drunkards who behaved so brutally to their daughter?"

"The father and mother of that woman?" interrogated Mr. Rawson. "I took care to let the parish authorities know about them. They had absolutely no clew to the whereabouts of the children—nor of their daughter—unless she gave it them. The wretches wrote to Lilian, begging once or twice, but I insisted on her taking no notice."

"Then they have tried another method of blackmailing," said the colonel. "This is their work."

"Then the first step is to find them," remarked the Rector, with a gleam of hope.

"Our first step is to tell Macdonald," said the colonel, rising, and walking to the window.

"Tell—Willie?" said Mr. Rawson, aghast. "Surely, we can manage it all without half killing the poor fellow with suspense! Think, Geoffrey—consider!"

"Our first step is to tell Macdonald," repeated Geoffrey Ware doggedly, "unless we drop being men of honor and turn Jesuits. You are not looking the situation in the face, man. William Macdonald must leave Lilian—at once."

"Leave Lilian? Oh, my poor girl—so delicate still too—so dependent on him!"

"He has a first-rate excuse just now. His affairs require his presence in town; the lawyers cannot do without him."

"But she knows he could go backward and forward," said the Rector. "That wouldn't satisfy her about the separation."

"Then there must be some other valid excuse.'

"His mother was looking ill," said the Rector. "But where are you going?"—for his son-in-law took up his hat, and was moving toward the door.

"Unless you are dealing with soldiers, if you want a thing done, do it yourself," answered the colonel dryly. "Sending a message to the Hall by one of the farm-men—or, worse still, by one of the maids—would mean a bungle. I shall bring Macdonald back with me in a trap and break the news to him at once, for there is no time to lose. He must accompany me back to town to-night," he added significantly. "He must not spend one hour at the Hall till all this is cleared up."

"Oh, my poor bairns, my poor bairns!" groaned the Rector wofully, as he heard Geoffrey's footsteps grow fainter in the distance. "Will the consequences of that miserable man's sin never come to an end? They were—they are—Heaven help them—so happy, so innocently, virtuously happy, and here is the serpent again, to sting them mortally perhaps this time!"

His grief, as he buried his face in his hands, would have been still sharper, his self-reproach that it was he who had been instrumental in bringing Lilian and Willie together still more bitter, if he could have seen them at that moment.

They were so happy!

Lilian, being still considered somewhat of an invalid, did not dine late as yet, and generally retired to her room to superintend the great ceremony of baby's night-toilet when the dinner-bell rang and the rest of the family party adjourned to the dining-room. This hour or two between afternoon tea and her baby's bed-time was the most precious of all the day to the new-made mother. Willie was always with her, watching baby lying on her lap, stretching and kicking and cooing. Sometimes Lilith would kneel on the floor by them—she was never tired of coaxing baby to lavish his first smiles upon his big sister. Often Madame Ware would come to them, or the squire, who was highly pleased to have a grandson, although he secretly regretted that he was not paternally a Ware—that the colonel was not little Geoffrey's parent, instead of being only his godfather. He consoled himself by the reflection that more than often first cousins' children were idiots: and anything but a "softy" for him, even if it was a fast fellow. The Wares had been fast, too many of them!

This evening Lilian was in the parlor when her husband returned

from Mr. Law's funeral; and, when the colonel arrived post-haste, and was by his request shown at once into the "parlor" where Willie was, this was what he saw—Lilian, delicate, pale, but with a peculiarly youthful and angelic expression on her sweet face, half crouching, half lying back on pillows in a large arm-chair, the pink fat baby sprawling on her lap, a ray of red sunlight falling across her golden hair—which was all loose upon her white wrapper—upon the firm mottled limbs of the infant, whose dress had been unfastened that he might have what his mother called "a good kick;" Willie sitting on the sofa, gazing delightedly upon his loved ones; and Lilith, still in her painting-frock which was of all colors of the rainbow and more besides—kneeling by her mother tickling baby's dimpled cheeks with a feather—a proceeding which, while it astonished him, he appeared to take pleasure in.

And he, the colonel, had come to break up this happy group—perhaps for always!

Another man might have flinched; but with Geoffrey Ware justice preceded mercy. He no more turned aside from what he considered to be his duty now than he would have done when giving the word of command to his men to advance upon the enemy, if their wives or children or mothers or sweethearts had thrown themselves at his knees imploring him to save their soldier-relatives from danger and perhaps death.

Looking up, Willie read some urgent need for action in the colonel's set face. At the sight of him he arose almost involuntarily.

"You want me," he said, more as an assertion than in inquiry.

"Yes," answered the colonel, "at once. Will you order a chaise? The quicker we go the better."

Willie went out.

"Who is ill?" asked Lilian anxiously, all the smiles fading from her face. "Hush, baby!" for the infant screwed up his face and gave a cry.

"No one," said the colonel abruptly. "The Rector wants to consult Willie at once on some important business."

"About Mr. Law's will?" asked Lilith, leaning against the table and looking keenly at the colonel. She detected mischief, which persons with large powers of observation will scent as a trained hound scents a fox.

"I did not ask," said the colonel.

Then Willie came back, and, going up to his wife, put his arm round her with such caressing tenderness and kissed her and the baby so fondly, so protectingly, that even the colonel felt a pang.

"I shall not be long, darling," he said. "My uncle told me he might possibly want me." Then, turning to Lilith, he said, "Don't wait dinner," adding in an undertone, "Convince your mother that there is nothing, absolutely nothing the matter."

Those were the last words poor Lilith heard from her genial kind friend for many a weary day.

The two men went silently round to the stable, where the groom was hastily harnessing a swift horse to a light American two-wheeled chaise.

"You had better follow, and go straight to the station," the col-

onel said aside to the man. "We shall be there to meet the last up-train. And no word to any one here; do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered the man humbly, as men generally spoke to Geoffrey Ware when he was "on duty." The colonel had assured himself of the groom's trustworthiness some time before, therefore had no misgiving that his orders would not be executed.

"What is all this about?" asked Willie anxiously, as they sped along the road—the gray stepped out bravely. "I cannot understand why my uncle could not tell me as we were coming home to-day."

"He would not have told you but for me," said Geoffrey Ware. "I would not take a step in the affair until you were in it."

"Am I implicated then?" asked Willie, a disagreeable suspicion arising in his mind that this mystery was no trifle.

"Well, it certainly concerns you as much as or more than it concerns Mr Rawson; at all events, it concerns some one very dear to you both."

"My wife?" Willie felt giddy, his hands shook. It was well that they would presently reach the gate of the Rectory fields; he could hardly hold the reins.

"I think I may say 'Yes,'" said the colonel. "It may be a matter of no moment, or it may be serious—there is no between; but the Rector will tell you better than I can."

Here they halted. They had not quite reached the gate of the fields; but the Rector stepped out from the shadow, and one of the men on the farm came forward to stand at the horse's head.

"Take the chaise gently through the field, and wait in the station-road," said Mr. Rawson to the man as the colonel and Willie alighted. "Has he told you?" he continued, turning to his nephew.

"I have prepared him," said the colonel.

Then the three marched silently down the sloping field into the house, which looked like some rustic haven of rest bathed in the pink light of sunset. Willie felt dazed rather than anxious; he had come into this Slough of Despond suddenly, he knew not how. He expected nothing; still he had no fear but that this darkness would soon pass—no fear, no real idea of what this all really meant, till he was seated in the Rector's study, the anonymous letter which declared that Lilian's former husband was still alive, that his wife was not his wife, his son not his lawfully-begotten son, in his hand, then—

"By Heaven, this is a lie!" he cried, and fell back like a dead log, life, thought, sensation, arrested by the cruel shock.

They dashed cold water on his face, laid him on the floor flat on his back, poured brandy down his throat as soon as he could swallow, then assisted him in his struggles to rise.

"I repeat that it is a lie," he gasped, the instant that he was sufficiently recovered to articulate, "a foul, diabolical lie; and, if I had the creature, the scoundrel who invented it, here now, weak as I feel, I could twist his throat and crush the life out of him, if I knew I should swing for it!"

He looked so wild, with his damp dishevelled hair, his furious eyes, his white drawn lips, that the Rector was frightened; and the colonel thought the man would hardly be fit for action till he had been in the doctor's hands; however, so soon as he roused his love for his wife and child, and saw how imperative it was that steps

to prove the falsity of the anonymous liar should be taken for their dear sake, he rallied himself with an effort and discussed the situation with his two friends.

Before ten o'clock struck from the old church on the hill, the colonel, Willie Macdonald, and the Rector were all three on their way to London, and two letters were dispatched, one from Willie to Lilian—

"My own Wife,—I have thought it right to accompany my uncle and Cousin Geoffrey to town to night, for I can render them material help in some important business. Say nothing of this to any one; make any simple excuse you like to your parents; I will return as soon as possible. Meanwhile I pray Heaven to bless and keep my darlings. Willie."

Another, marked private, from the same to Lilith—

"Lilith,—I am terribly tried. I rely on you to keep our darling safe and well, and your dear mother free from ideas of difficulty or danger to our happiness. I trust you, dear Lilith. W. M."

Lilian was comforted by her husband's letter. Lilith, stealing in late at night, saw her sweetly asleep, her baby on her arm. She stood looking at them, her face drawn with pain—she, who had never been rightly informed as to the death of Captain Drew, had immediately suspected that her father might be still alive.

Meanwhile she had written to her close friend Michael Druce—

"I fear some trouble is coming upon us through my late father. I feel that you, as one who knows foreign countries, may possibly be able to give us important help. As a matter of fact, I am utterly ignorant of what this threatened trouble is; but I ask you, as a great favor, to go to Mr. Macdonald, and help him if you can; he is most likely in Prince's Square. Your unhappy friend,

"Lilith."

This was a gradually augmenting anxiety, but it was borne by many shoulders.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Michael Druce was working steadfastly in the house in Arbor Lane. Now that England, in the person of Lilith, had become dear to him, and now that England had taken him by the hand so far as to hang his picture upon the walls of her Academical Exhibition, his roaming fit was arrested.

At first his little French mother hardly believed in her good fortune; but, when Michael came seriously to consult her about a permanent studio, to ask her whether she would give up a sitting-room or part of the garden to build upon, she began to hope that at last her bird-on-the-wing had come home to roost.

"There is some *petite demoiselle* to thank for this," she assured herself, nodding her pretty quaint old head as she stitched away at

her embroidery frame. "Ah,"—threading her needle—"she and I will be good friends, I promise her that—very good friends!"

Still she had not the slightest suspicion as to who the *petite demoiselle* might be, for it was perhaps a proof of the depth and reality of Michael's passion for Lilith that he had not confided this, his first manhood's love, to his mother, as he used to confess his boyish fancies and admirations, or relate tales of glorious beings he had met during his travels.

"She shall be my wife if she says 'No' a million times!" he had assured himself after his first rebuff. At present he intended to wait and to work in silence. He was biding his time.

The time was at hand—close—at the very doors; but he knew it not. The morning came which actually was to decide his fate for life.

He was in his studio. This was anciently the dining-room where he and his mother had entertained Willie Macdonald and Colonel Ware at breakfast on the morning they came to see his pictures.

It was transformed. The window had been heightened; an alcove had been built out, with a stained-glass window, making a species of Eastern recess, with tiled flooring, cushions, fans pendent from the painted ceiling, and rich stuff curtains hung upon a rod, to be drawn as the light in the studio demanded. The skeleton and the lay figure had a new companion in a full suit of armor. Spears and dented shields, savage trophies all beads and shining beetleskins, great rows of Venetian beads, shelves of pottery from all parts of the world, collected during his travels, covered the walls; a few ancient Grecian marble morsels—hands, feet, mutilated heads—hung here and there, and there were one or two old oil-paintings. Druce had packed away all his sketches and pictures that were not sold, or exhibited, or hung about the house, in his former painting-room upstairs; the one picture he was working at was on his easel.

It was a portrait of Lilith, painted from memory. Memory? It was scarcely that. Was there one grand curve, one peculiar sweep of outline in her lithe figure, one shade of the peculiar brown of her marvelously delicate skin, one flash of her great eyes, one twist or frown of her marked brows, one droop of the expressive lips, that he had not mentally registered? This Druce asked himself when he began to paint Lilith's portrait; and the answer, honestly given, was "No."

It was a glorious picture, although but the painted effigy of a young woman. It grew into life more and more every day. Druce had painted his lady-love as an Eastern water-carrier. A brown water-jar was poised on her head, and she looked straight out of the canvas at the beholder with a glance inquiring, pathetic, fierce—a glance he had had from Lilith many a time, short though the period was during which he had known her.

Mrs. Druce, poor little lady, watched the coming into canvas-life of the *créature magnifique*, as she called that which she supposed to be purely and simply the offspring of her son's imagination, little dreaming of his pensive passion while he painted the long lithe arms and dashed fire into the eloquent eyes, little dreaming that the original was an "English mees" who ought, according to her idea, to have been fair, round, blue-eyed, and simpering as a Greuze model.

The picture seemed more alive than ever that morning when the old butler, with a look half chiding, half inquisitive, brought Michael Lilith's letter. He waited, seriously watching his young master; but he was scarcely prepared for his excitement.

Lilith appealing to him! Lilith presuming he had knowledge of her dead father!—he had heard the story from the colonel. Lilith in trouble, asking him, Michael, to help her! It seemed so extraordinary, so bewildering, he grew giddy; he hardly knew what to do, whither or when to go, at first. But in a few minutes he calmed down. He went to his mother, told her a friend who was in trouble had sent for him, then dressed as calmly as he could, and went off to Prince's Square.

Never had hansom seemed so ponderous, horse so lazy, driver so listless! He did not know why Lilith sent him to Macdonald or what he was to do; but he obeyed her as if she were his queen

Arrived at Prince's Square, his knock was answered by the butler, more solemnly discouraging in his manner than ever.

Mr. Macdonald? He did not think that Mr. Macdonald could see any one. Perhaps Mr. Rawson might. Would he wish to see Mr. Rawson?

Of course he would; and, as he gave his card to the man, Michael slipped a gold coin into his hand, which, although it considerably softened Mrs. Law's factotum's manner, exercised his mind; and, as he took in the card, he felt, as he afterward told the cook, "upset."

Mr. Rawson came out; and, although he wondered at seeing Druce just then, he asked him into the library.

"These are my credentials," said Druce, handing him Lilith's letter.

The Rector sat down in a library chair and read Lilith's letter—seemingly with great deliberation; but he was thinking—rapidly.

"Do you mean to help us, my dear boy?" he asked.

"With all my strength. I cannot say more," said Michael. "I am not clever, as you know, sir. I am barely a man, as men go in these days—much less am I a man of the world; but, to tell you the truth, I love Miss Drew. I told her so, and she rejected me on the spot. But it made no difference to me; and, I tell you candidly, I hope to win her some day. Meanwhile I would go to the end of the world for her; and, you see, she does me the credit of knowing that."

He spoke ingenuously. The Rector appeared slightly amused; but he was not the one to underrate an enthusiastic ally. They had a long talk. He took Druce greatly into his confidence. Michael knew much of the state of affairs already; but this recent phase astonished him.

"Do you mean to say they have actually put themselves out about an anonymous letter?" he asked contemptuously. "My dear sir, you should be a public person who has made—I don't even say a great success—but some success! You would care for anonymous letters less than you would for a slight shower like this"—it was raining—"when you are provided with a good stout umbrella. You protect yourself by indifference, and go on just the same."

"That would scarcely do in this case," said Mr. Rawson sadly.

"To begin with, we have to deal with adventurers. The woman who ran away with Captain Drew was plausible; she could write eloquent letters and assume the saint at will—a way that would hoodwink anybody; but she may have lied all the time. I cannot but feel that she did. We have seen General Drew's executor—a Captain Mayne. He found no paper whatever that was an authentic witness to the death of Captain Drew. The colonel himself has started for Ilfracombe, to hear every particular of the unfortunate actress from the doctor and his wife under whose care she died. A detective is searching for those depraved old people her parents, who will be compelled to stand and deliver what they know, if indeed it is to be got out of them."

Here Willie Macdonald came in. Two days of this disturbance had changed him. His cheeks seemed hollow, he was of a sallow pallor, his hair was rough, and he looked altogether unkempt, as if he had been up all night.

"Ah, Druce, how are you?" he said carelessly; then he went and asked Mr. Rawson in a low tone if "they" had "come back with that 'Bradshaw.'"

"You can speak loud, my boy. Mr. Druce, our friend, knows all about this."

"And pray who told you?" asked Willie surlily of Michael.

"I have had a letter from Miss Drew, asking me to offer you my services—and that I do most heartily," said Michael, rising and going up to Willie, who was leaning with folded arms against the dining-table.

"Thanks; but there is nothing to be done," returned Willie, in the hard voice which is so often the index of despair. "I am now starting for ——, where that woman wrote from, stating that her paramour was dead. I expected they had brought the latest Continental 'Bradshaw' to my uncle there; I was waiting for it; but they are such a time over everything!" he said irritably. "Patience? Job's patience would have been of no use these days!"

Here the butler brought in the thick little book with the flimsy yellow cover which has made its appearance as often amid the greatest misery as in the presence of happiness, and the three, with earnestness that was almost desperate, began to consult time-tables of mail-trains, expresses abroad, and the hours of arrival and departure.

Michael Druce was of great service. As a constant traveler, he was a man who had lived in foreign countries and knew their "ways" better than he knew the manners and customs of his own country. He had an intention to carry out, so he was unusually gentle and forbearing with Willie, who, when Michael said presently, in a determined manner, "I will accompany you," did not refuse. He had previously refused the Rector's companionship, feeling that, if he failed, if he found that Captain Drew had not died as stated, he would have no man living witness to his agony, if indeed he did not end it by suicide there and then.

Michael was inwardly gratified, though he would not show it, lest Macdonald, in his irritated state, should change his mind. So he arranged everything in a very methodical and matter-of-fact man-

ner. He sent a note to his mother, with instructions for packing; then he wrote to Lilith—

"MY DEAR MISS LILITH,—Assure your mother that her husband is well. He is allowing me to assist him in his business, and in a very little while we shall hope—all—to meet again at Heathside.

"Your faithful friend,

"MICHAEL."

Lilith, who had begun to suspect that something was seriously amiss, had had trouble with her mother.

Mrs. Macdonald, on whose second married life no actual cloud had rested, had, in spite of her efforts to be calm, been slightly unhinged. She had had a restless night with the young autocrat Geoffrey; and Lilith, stealing into her mother's room in the early morning, found her in tears. She tried to hide them; but Lilith, who meant to have no shadow between their minds while she was in charge of the mother and babe, said boldly—

"You have been crying—what about?"

Then she sat down on the bed, and laughed at her—actually dared to tease her—then went down to the squire, and said he must "lead her a life—that she was lovesick." Then, later on, she made very merry with Kate Rawson, who came to call, and who knew and suspected nothing; and, as it was a fine hot day, they sat out in the garden with Madam Ware and Lilian and the baby, and Lilith fetched some oldest of old nursery-books which she had found in a closet in a lumber-room—the squire's baby-books, most likely—and, reading these aloud and looking at the rudimentary attempts at woodcuts, passed away the time till the nurse came to carry in the young monarch, when his court broke up and his mother followed in his train.

She seemed tranquil and content; but that night, when Lilith, who had insisted on sleeping in the next room to her while Willie was away, was just extinguishing her candle, she heard a shrill cry. Rushing into the next room, she saw her mother standing there in the moonlight, wringing her hands.

"He is dead," she cried—"he is dead!" She had been dreaming.

Lilith lit her candles, and soothed and comforted her—almost as if she were the mother and Lilian the child; then she summoned the nurse, sent her with the baby into the next room, and stayed with her mother till morning.

Mrs. Macdonald was unhappy about her husband. The one idea which gave her comfort was that on the morrow she would receive a letter from him.

"To-morrow will be the fourth day since he left me," she said. "He must have had time to write by this."

Lilith assented. When she watched the old postman coming along the road through the park with the post bag, she fetched the key, rushed to meet him, sent him round to the servants' quarters—where he usually rested till the bag was ready for him again—ran in through the hall door, unlocked the bag, and shook out the contents upon the sideboard in the dining-room. Not one from Willie!

She turned them over again in consternation. What was she to do?

She must put a brave face upon the matter. She went to her mother's room, and chatted "nothings," remarking casually that there was no letter from Willie.

"Late for the post most likely," she said.

Her mother made no remark, and remained very silent.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Rawson was announced; he had composed his face into a less troubled expression by the mirror in the hall, and, as he went into the drawing-room cheerily saying, "Well, what news?" his little bit of acting deceived even Lilian Macdonald herself.

There could not be much gone wrong, she thought, as she sat and talked to the Rector in the gloaming.

"Oh, indeed! Well, with all he has to get through, I don't wonder," he said, in answer to her remarks that Willie had not written. Then he gave her a lengthy account of the disagreeable legal business attendant upon ill-worded wills. "I don't know what Mr. Law's solicitor can have been about," he remarked. "The matter was really so extremely simple—all left to your husband, only a life-interest to Mrs. Law, chargeable upon the estate. You can imagine how anything involved annoyed Mrs. Law, who thinks, resolves, and acts almost at one and the same moment."

"Yes," said Lilian; "but I hope the money is all safe. There will be no Chancery business?" she added timidly, for her ignorance of law was much the same as that of any ordinary woman. "Every one will get everything?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" answered the Rector, inwardly, gratified at the success of his speech. "It may be a matter of a week or two, perhaps only of a few days." Then he changed the conversation to ordinary impersonal topics. Even Lilith, who had been examining his face curiously from under her long black lashes, could not quite "make him out."

She thought it would look suspicious if she followed Mr. Rawson from the room, so she settled her anxiety and her curiosity as to what was being done, and was content with the fact that her mother seemed more "herself."

Mr. Rawson went out pleased, although several times during his journey home he stopped short and said, "If I have told lies, may Heaven forgive me!"—and, as he drew near to his home, and saw the lights twinkling about the rustic house, which was defined in clear black outline against the luminous evening sky, he told himself that never more—no, never—would he dare to think or say aught against the Jesuits, for he had been worse than a Jesuit himself.

He avoided going to the Hall again; he sent Kate instead. The first three days she brought him good news—at least she had evidently not noticed a difference in Mrs. Macdonald or Lilith.

After a day or two, Mrs. Rawson went to the Hall; she brought back a note from Lilith to the Rector.

"What are we to do? What is going on? No one has written. Do you know anything? I will be at church to-morrow morning, and will come to the vestry for your replies."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE next day, Sunday, was wet, but Lilith insisted on going to church. She saw her godfather, who comforted her as well as he could. Everything that could be done was being done, *et cætera*.

"But have you heard from any of them yet?" asked Lilith. "Surely there has been time! At least the colonel might have found out something—you say he is only in Devonshire. Then Michael, and Willie?"

The Rector explained that their business might be an affair of weeks, and during that time he could not write—how could he?

"What shall we do?" cried Lilith, unnerved.

"My dear, dear child, there is nothing for us but patience," said Mr. Rawson—"nothing, nothing; if we are patient, nothing can get the better of us. If the great trial should come to me that I may have to tell your mother to prepare for a terrible shock, I shall have the strength to do it. Not that I think this," he added, seeing an awful look settle upon Lilith's face; "but it is the best thing that we can do, while we hope for the best, to prepare for the worst."

Lilith went home utterly wretched.

The Rector felt oppressed with fear; the colonel had not written. At present the detectives had not discovered the old couple they were seeking, and Michael and Willie were silent.

Two days more, and the Rector determined to face Lilian Ware—as he called her in his own mind, in his horror of what her legal name might still be. He started for the Hall in the early morning; the harvesters were at work, the dew sparkled in the sunshine on the grassy hedgerows, the meadows looked fair and peaceful, the birds sung happily in the wood. Gazing at the lovely landscape spread out before him, at the violet haze above the wooded hills, at the streamlet curling in and out, bordered by willows under which the cattle herded, some lying down, some standing and switching their tails, it seemed impossible to him that this beautiful world could be the stage on which such a soul-tragedy would be enacted as that which threatened the innocent, loving Lilian, her husband, their boy—in fact, the whole family.

"It will not be," he said to himself, setting his stick firmly upon the ground. "Our God punishes, but He does not torment. It cannot be true!"

He was in the lane. The next turn would bring him out opposite to the park gates. Just as he said the words aloud, he turned. He heard galloping, a shrill voice urging a panting horse. He had barely time to stand aside before Lilith cantered up—she was on the squire's black horse.

"What a mercy I have met you!" she cried, springing down. "My mother—I think she is dead, or dying; some letter—it is clinched in her hand! They have gone for Doctor Fyres—I came for you! Get up—let me ride behind you!"

The Rector, stunned for a moment, mounted the great creature as if he had suddenly become a boy of twenty again. Lilith sprung

up lightly, and held him round the waist. Thus they arrived at the Hall.

"The dining-room—at once!" cried Lilith, flying before him.

The Rector threw the reins to a groom, who was awaiting them, half scared out of his wits, and followed her.

Lilian was lying stretched upon the floor in the great dark room. At first sight the Rector thought life must have left the motionless body; there was the grand awful calm of death upon the expressionless features. Madam Ware was crouched by her daughter; she and Mary the maid were quietly chafing her hands, sprinkling her face, using the prescribed means of restoration The squire was standing apart, the tears rolling down his quivering face. He looked shrunken and aged.

"They have killed my gal, Rawson!" he said. "They have killed her—my only gal! But I don't know how—I don't know how!" Then he sobbed like a child.

"Look at this!" whispered Lilith, slipping something into the Rector's hand.

Walking to the window, he saw it was a crumpled letter. He smoothed it out and read—

"MADAM,—As I find that your friends are trying to keep the truth from you, I feel it my duty to inform you that your husband, Captain Drew, is still alive. The woman who lived with him placed him in a lunatic asylum abroad before she declared him dead.

"Your servant,

"A WELL-WISHER."

"Heaven help her!" said the Rector, thrusting the paper into his pocket. "The vipers! What is it for? To extort money?" It seemed impossible to him that creatures capable of writing these anonymous letters would have the courage to proclaim a lie—so his heart failed him.

"It would be as well perhaps if this were death," he thought, seating himself sadly and silently near the prostrate figure.

The squire sat at a distance, his face buried in his hands, afraid to inquire what all this meant, with an intuitive perception that the first marriage was somehow the cause. Lilith stood alternately watching her mother and the window by which Dr. Fyres must pass to reach the entrance.

The clock ticked away heavily. The seconds seemed whole painful minutes. The Rector felt stupefied, bereft of ideas. If no news came, what was he to do? He told himself he must telegraph. But where, and to whom?

"The affair has come to a dead-lock," he thought, just as cheerful active little Dr. Fyres arrived, and came in rubbing his hands and nodding pleasantly around, as if it were the most ordinary experience to see beautiful patients laid out corpse-like upon the floor.

"You have not moved her? Quite right, quite right. Let her lie, poor soul!" he said, feeling her pulse. "She wants rest—nervous shock. Pray do not alarm yourself, my dear lady"—to Madam Ware—"and you, Rector. Why, I should have asked your help by-

and-by to assist in carrying Mrs. Macdonald to her room; but by the time she is in a fit state to be moved some one else will be here who has a prior right."

"What?" gasped the rector.

"Oh, yes, there is little doubt of the prior right!" said the little doctor aside to Mr. Rawson, smiling and squinting slightly as he dropped some liquid from a little vial he drew from his breast-pocket into a wine-glass. "In the station road I passed Mr. Macdonald and that foreign-looking young gentleman who was at the wedding. Mr. Macdonald looked so changed, so worn, that I at once said to myself 'A little matrimonial breeze!' Of course I may be wrong," he added, reading horror in the Rector's face, "but I hope not, for these things so soon blow over, and no harm done. May I trouble you for the water-jug? Thanks!"

As Dr. Fyres went back to his patient to try to administer the draught, the Rector was giddy with mingled fear and hope. They were coming, but what news would they bring? Surely Willie would not come there to break to Lilian the news that Captain Drew still lived? But would he not have telegraphed—would he not have hurried back—had his news been good news?

He closed his eyes; he felt more tired and low-spirited through this late worry than he had felt after writing a difficult paper on "the connection of languages in regard to their origin," which had kept him up for several nights. The moisture was stealing through his eyelashes, and he was telling himself that he was growing very old, when the door opened, and two people stood in the doorway.

The figures were still—black effigies against the light; then suddenly there was a cry, and William Macdonald rushed forward and flung himself down by his wife.

Some one, who really was Michael Druce, went round saying—

"Everything is all right; I give you my word it is."

Then the Rector found himself begging each person present to "leave them alone."

"I think you are perfectly right," said Dr. Fyres, offering his arm to Madam Ware. "Mrs. Macdonald has quite recovered from her fainting-fit now"—dryly, with a glance toward Lilian, whose head was supported on her husband's shoulder. "We had better adjourn to the drawing-room, and I will prescribe for all this undue excitability."

When they were all seated, Michael stood on the hearthrug and related the terrible scare, gravely, but with an admixture of dry humor which softened the pain of those who had been sufferers thereby, notably Lilith and the Rector. They had met with no difficulty, he and Willie. Arrived at the town whence the actress had written to General Drew informing him of his son's death, they went straightway to the Protestant minister, who had seen Captain Drew constantly during his lifetime, had kept the certificate of death, had been present when the coffin was closed, and had buried the corpse of a man whose ill deeds had caused such cruel pain to so many. On their way to Heathside, they had stayed a couple of hours in London, and had seen the detectives who had found the old people, and also satisfactory proofs that the communications which had caused all the trouble had emanated from them.

Willie and Lilian took no steps to punish the old folk; instead, Willie secretly saw that they were provided for while prevented from doing more mischief. Meanwhile the miserable old couple could not "leave well alone." They made efforts to find General Drew and his sisters—their orphan grandchildren—that they might better their position through the young people's influence; however, some kind friends had foreseen this possibility.

One day, when Lilian asked her husband about Captain Drew's unfortunate children, he smiled, and showed her a photograph. It was of a comfortable little homestead in an Australian settlement. A pleasant-looking young mother was sitting on a bench, a baby in her arms, and General Drew was lounging on the grass, while his two sisters were smilingly clinging to her, and her stalwart bearded husband stood behind them. Captain Drew's children had a new name, new parents, in a new country, and were not cared for by the young emigrants who had adopted them only because of the capital they had brought, but out of good honest love.

* * * * * *

Lilian and Willie were happy. They were enjoying the blessedness, almost too keen for earth-life, of sudden relief from a cruel care, an overpowering dread. Those who have known this transition go their ways in awe, and are perhaps never quite so hopeful or quite so free from "fear and trembling" as the rest of their kind who have traveled over level ground. But, like all suffering, it stamps the character with an indelible seal; and those who have gone through the fire bravely and patiently come to a state of calm where ordinary annoyances fly over their heads or disappear at their very tread.

* * * * * * *

Heathside Hall, a year later, was so peaceful, so bright, that it would have required a powerful imagination and a lively faith in an onlooker who heard the story of the trials and troubles of its inmates to credit that any of the placid happy-looking people within its walls had bravely gone through such ups and downs.

The squire, hearty as ever, took a lively interest in his "children," as he promiscuously called Willie and Lilian Macdonald and their son, also Colonel and Mrs. Ware and their lately-arrived little daughter, and the newly-arrived couple, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Druce.

Michael and Lilith lived with their sweet little French mother in the old house in the lane; but they paid constant, if short, visits to the old home—the place where they first began to love each other. Their match had been made very simply, so simply that it was a long time before Lilith ceased to blush, or Michael to laugh, when their engagement was alluded to.

On the day when the violent storm broke upon the husband and wife, William and Lilian Macdonald, but ended in calm and sunshine, these two, Michael and Lilith, both almost children in worldliness, children in their love for their fellow-creatures and their art, went out into the garden. Lilith took refuge in the old wigwam,

and was sobbing out all her pain and suspense and relief, her head upon the wooden table, little dreaming that any human creature was near, when she heard some one saying, "Oh, dear, oh, dear!" And, looking up, she saw it was the young man whose love she had rejected, but to whom she had instinctively gone in the time of trouble. Tears were streaming down his brown cheeks, and he was contemplating her with such a pitiful hopeless look that she laughed, hysterically perhaps, but still she laughed. Then they shook hands, then—neither knew how, or when, or why—they kissed each other like two children, and like two children went back, clinging to each other, to the house.

"You have no idea how it hurts me to see you cry, or I am sure you wouldn't do it," said Michael.

"I won't again," said Lilith, utterly subdued.

They had not said one word about marriage or love; but they knew that this meant both.

On the terrace they met Madam Ware, and Michael said—

"Lilith will be my wife, if you and the squire and Mrs. Macdonald will let us."

But Madam Ware only smiled, and told them they were silly children, adding for their comfort—

"Not but what I really do think your marriage is made in heaven, all the same."

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